WOVEN WORDS

TEXTBOOK IN ENGLISH FOR CLASS XI

(ELECTIVE COURSE)

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11074

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Foreword

The National Curriculum Framework, (NCF) 2005, recommends that children's life at school must be linked to their life outside the school. This principle marks a departure from the legacy of bookish learning which continues to shape our system and causes a gap between the school, home and community. The syllabi and textbooks developed on the basis of NCF signify an attempt to implement this basic idea. They also attempt to discourage rote learning and the maintenance of sharp boundaries between different subject areas. We hope these measures will take us significantly further in the direction of a child-centred system of education outlined in the National Policy on Education (1986).

The success of this effort depends on the steps that school principals and teachers will take to encourage children to reflect on their own learning and to pursue imaginative activities and questions. We must recognise that, given space, time and freedom, children generate new knowledge by engaging with the information passed on to them by adults. Treating the prescribed textbook as the sole basis of examination is one of the key reasons why other resources and sites of learning are ignored. Inculcating creativity and initiative is possible if we perceive and treat children as participants in learning, not as receivers of a fixed body of knowledge.

These aims imply considerable change in school routines and mode of functioning. Flexibility in the daily time-table is as necessary as rigour in implementing the annual calendar so that the required number of teaching days are actually devoted to teaching. The methods used for teaching and evaluation will also determine how effective this textbook proves for making children's life at school a happy experience, rather than a source of stress or boredom. Syllabus designers have tried to address the problem of curricular burden by restructuring and reorienting knowledge at different stages with greater consideration for child psychology and the time available for teaching. The textbook attempts to enhance this endeavour by giving higher priority and space to opportunities for contemplation and wondering, discussion in small groups, and activities requiring hands-on experience.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) appreciates the hard work done by the textbook development

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committee responsible for this book. We wish to thank the Chairperson of the advisory group in languages, Professor Namwar Singh and the Chief Advisor for this book, Professor R. Amritavalli for guiding the work of this committee. Several teachers contributed to the development of this textbook; we are grateful to their principals for making this possible. We are indebted to the institutions and organisations which have generously permitted us to draw upon their resources, material and personnel. We are especially grateful to the members of the National Monitoring Committee, appointed by the Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development under the Chairmanship of Professor Mrinal Miri and Professor G.P. Deshpande, for their valuable time and contribution. As an organisation committed to systemic reform and continuous improvement in the quality of its products, NCERT welcomes comments and suggestions which will enable us to undertake further revision and refinement.

Director
National Council of Educational
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New Delhi
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A Note for the Teacher

Woven Words is based on the new syllabus in English prepared in consonance with the spirit of the National Curriculum Framework 2005. This textbook is designed for students who have opted to study English as an elective subject at the higher secondary stage. The main objectives of this book are to help students

- read literary texts with pleasure and understanding
- develop critical thinking and literary appreciation
- develop a sensitivity to the nuances of language.

Woven Words is an integrated book consisting of three sections namely, short stories, poems and essays representative of literature in English from around the world. Most of the short stories included here are by contemporary writers. There is a fair share of Indian Writing in English with Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri reflecting rural, urban and diasporic experiences. *The Rocking Horse* by D.H. Lawrence and *The Luncheon* by Somerset Maugham add native English flavour to the collection, and the Sherlock Holmes story would definitely appeal to youngsters looking for some thrill in reading. Chekhov's *The Lament,* a touching account of insensitivity to bereavement, underscores the universality of the human condition.

The aim of this selection is to make learners approach reading as a pleasurable activity. The stories are followed by exercises under four heads—textual comprehension, talking about the texts, literary appreciation and language work. These aim at fostering critical reading in the learners and instilling in them the confidence to express their responses. The second head encourages learners to discuss their responses with each other in pairs or small groups.

The poetry selection, representing different forms such as the lyric, sonnet and ode, reflects some of the pressing concerns of the contemporary world such as racial discrimination (Wole Soyinka's *Telephone Conversation* and W.H. Auden's *Refugee Blues*), marginalisation of languages (Padma Sachdev's *Mother Tongue*), environmental issues (Dilip Chitre's *Felling of the Banyan Tree*), manipulative politics (Arun Kolatkar's satire, *Ajamil and the Tigers*), and sensitive comment on human relationships (Nissim Ezekiel's *For Elkana* and Philip Larkin's *Coming*). *Hawk Roosting* by Ted Hughes brings out the parallel in human behaviour to the predatory instincts

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of animals while Sujata Bhatt's *The Peacock* is a delightful visualisation of the bird's colours and grace of movement. Also included are all-time classics: pieces of enduring charm and appeal from Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Keats. Forms like the limerick and the haiku add variety to the reading experience and introduce an element of light humour and fun.

The activities suggested for the poems are directed more at eliciting sensitive responses to the issues and the language rather than detailed textual comprehension. Difficult words have not been glossed as the aim is to encourage learners to make intelligent guesses or refer to the dictionary when they encounter unfamiliar terms. However, allusions to Greek mythology have been explained. A glossary of literary forms and terms has been provided at the end of the book.

While the content of most of the essays provides for serious reading, Mark Twain's *My Watch* is a humorous piece that lightens the section. Bertrand Russell's *The Three Passions*, a short excerpt from his autobiography, introduces students to a philosopher's perspectives on life and its primary concerns. Three of the essays are speeches recorded in writing. John Ruskin's *What is a Good Book?*, an excerpt from *Sesame and Lilies*, and E.M. Forster's piece on the elements of a good story, *from Aspects of the Novel*, prepare learners for literary criticism. S. Chandrasekhar's lecture, *Patterns of Creativity*, explores the relationship between poetry and science. G.N. Devy's *Tribal Verse*, in another strain, familiarises students with recent trends in looking at literature from non-conventional standpoints bringing in oral folk traditions into its fold. Kumudini Lakhia's autobiographical extract from *Women Who Dared* gives expression to an artist's approach to life and art.

The tasks that follow the essays demand learners' engagement with the texts and lead them on to a deep understanding of life and language. Teachers should help learners move towards reading with discernment.

The following are recommended for additional reading: *The Outsider* by Albert Camus; *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen; *Pygmalion* by G.B.Shaw and *Dancing in Cambodia and Other Stories* by Amitav Ghosh.

It is hoped that this course will lay the foundations for a study of English language and literature at the tertiary level of education.

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SHORT STORIES

INTRODUCTION

A short story is a brief work of prose fiction. It has a plot which may be comic, tragic, romantic or satiric; the story is presented to us from one of the many available points of view, and it may be written in the mode of fantasy, realism or naturalism.

In the 'story of incident' the focus of interest is on the course and outcome of events, as in the Sherlock Holmes story. The 'story of character' focuses on the state of mind and motivation, or on the psychological and moral qualities of the protagonist, as in *Glory at Twilight*. Chekov's *The Lament* focuses on form—nothing happens, or seems to happen, except an encounter and conversations, but the story becomes a revelation of deep sorrow.

The short story differs from the novel in magnitude. The limitation of length imposes economy of management and in literary effects. However, a short story can also attain a fairly long and complex form, where it approaches the expansiveness of the novel, which you may find in *The Third and Final Continent* in this unit.

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1 The Lament

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Anton Chekhov

☞ *Guess the meaning of these expressions from the context*

gingerbread horse	slough
snuffle	as if he were on needles

It is twilight. A thick wet snow is slowly twirling around the newly lighted street lamps and lying in soft thin layers on roofs, on horses' backs, on people's shoulders and hats. The cabdriver, Iona Potapov, is quite white and looks like a phantom: he is bent double as far as a human body can bend double; he is seated on his box; he never makes a move. If a whole snowdrift fell on him, it seems as if he would not find it necessary to shake it off. His little horse is also quite white, and remains motionless; its immobility, its angularity and its straight wooden-looking legs, even close by, give it the appearance of a gingerbread horse worth a *kopek*. It is, no doubt, plunged in deep thought. If you were snatched from the plough, from your usual gray surroundings, and were thrown into this slough full of monstrous lights, unceasing noise and hurrying people, you too would find it difficult not to think.

Iona and his little horse have not moved from their place for a long while. They left their yard before dinner and, up to now, not a fare. The evening mist is descending over the town, the white lights of the lamps are replacing brighter rays, and the hubbub of the street is getting louder. 'Cabby for Viborg Way!' suddenly hears Iona. 'Cabby!'

Iona jumps and, through his snow-covered eyelashes, sees an officer in a greatcoat, with his hood over his head.

'Viborg way!' the officer repeats. 'Are you asleep, eh? Viborg way!'

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With a nod of assent Iona picks up the reins, in consequence of which layers of snow slip off the horse's back and neck. The officer seats himself in the sleigh, the cabdriver smacks his lips to encourage his horse, stretches out his neck like a swan, sits up and, more from habit than necessity, brandishes his whip. The little horse also stretches its neck, bends its wooden-looking legs, and makes a move undecidedly.

'What are you doing, werewolf!' is the exclamation Iona hears from the dark mass moving to and fro, as soon as they have started.

'Where the devil are you going? To the r-r-right!'

'You do not know how to drive. Keep to the right!' calls the officer angrily.

A coachman from a private carriage swears at him; a passerby, who has run across the road and rubbed his shoulder against the horse's nose, looks at him furiously as he sweeps the snow from his sleeve. Iona shifts about on his seat as if he were on needles, moves his elbows as if he were trying to keep his equilibrium, and gasps about like someone suffocating, who does not understand why and wherefore he is there.

'What scoundrels they all are!' jokes the officer; 'one would think they had all entered into an agreement to jostle you or fall under your horse.'

Iona looks around at the officer and moves his lips. He evidently wants to say something but the only sound that issues is a snuffle.

'What?' asks the officer.

Iona twists his mouth into a smile and, with an effort, says hoarsely:

'My son, Barin, died this week.'

'Hm! What did he die of?'

Iona turns with his whole body towards his fare and says: 'And who knows! They say high fever. He was three days in the hospital and then died... God's will be done.'

"Turn round! The devil!' sounds from the darkness. 'Have you popped off, old doggie, eh? Use your eyes!'

'Go on, go on,' says the officer, 'otherwise we shall not get there by tomorrow. Hurry up a bit!'

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The cabdriver again stretches his neck, sits up and, with a bad grace, brandishes his whip. Several times again he turns to look at his fare, but the latter has closed his eyes and, apparently, is not disposed to listen. Having deposited the officer in the Viborg, he stops by the tavern, doubles himself up on his seat, and again remains motionless, while the snow once more begins to cover him and his horse. An hour, and another... Then, along the footpath, with a squeak of galoshes, and quarrelling, come three young men, two of them tall and lanky, the third one short and humpbacked.

'Cabby, to the Police Bridge!' in a cracked voice calls the humpback. 'The three of us for two *griveniks*.'

Iona picks up his reins and smacks his lips. Two *griveniks* is not a fair price, but he does not mind whether it is a rouble or five *kopeks*—to him it is all the same now, so long as they are fares. The young men, jostling each other and using bad language, approach the sleigh and all three at once try to get onto the seat; then begins a discussion as to which two shall sit and who shall be the one to stand. After wrangling, abusing each other and much petulance, it is at last decided that the humpback shall stand as he is the smallest.

'Now then, hurry up!' says the humpback in a twanging voice, as he takes his place and breathes in Iona's neck. 'Old furry! Here, mate, what a cap you have! There is not a worse one to be found in all Petersburg! ...'

'He-he—he-he', giggles Iona. 'Such a ...'

'Now you, 'such a', hurry up, are you going the whole way at this pace? Are you...Do you want it in the neck?'

'My head feels like bursting,' says one of the lanky ones. 'Last night at the Donkmasoves, Vaska and I drank the whole of four bottles of cognac.'

"I don't understand what you lie for,' says the other lanky one angrily; 'you lie like a brute.'

'God strike me, it's the truth!'

'It's as much the truth as that a louse coughs!'

'He-he,' grins Iona, 'what gay young gentlemen!'

'Pshaw, go to the devil!' says the humpback indignantly.

'Are you going to get on or not, you old pest? Is that the

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way to drive? Use the whip a bit! Go on, devil, go on, give it to him well!'

Iona feels at his back the little man wriggling, and the tremble in his voice. He listens to the insults hurled at him, sees the people, and little by little the feeling of loneliness leaves him. The humpback goes on swearing until he gets mixed up in some elaborate six-foot oath, or chokes with coughing. The lankies begin to talk about a certain Nadejda Petrovna. Iona looks round at them several times; he waits for a temporary silence, then, turning round again, he murmurs:

'My son... died this week.'

'We must all die,' sighs the humpback, wiping his lips after an attack of coughing. 'Now, hurry up, hurry up! Gentlemen, I really cannot go any farther like this! When will he get us there?'

'Well, just you stimulate him a little in the neck!'

'You old pest, do you hear, I'll bone your neck for you! If one treated the like of you with ceremony, one would have to go on foot! Do you hear, old serpent Gorinytch! Or do you not care a spit!"

Iona hears rather than feels the blow they deal him.

'He-he' he laughs. 'They are gay young gentlemen, God bless'em!'

'Cabby, are you married?' asks a lanky one.

'I? He-he, gay young gentlemen! Now I have only a wife and the moist ground...He, ho, ho, ...that is to say, the grave. My son has died, and I am alive...A wonderful thing, death mistook the door...instead of coming to me, it went to my son...'

Iona turns round to tell them how his son died but, at this moment, the humpback, giving a little sigh, announces, 'Thank God, we have at last reached our destination,' and Iona watches them disappear through the dark entrance. Once more he is alone, and again surrounded by silence... His grief, which has abated for a short while, returns and rends his heart with greater force. With an anxious and hurried look, he searches among the crowds passing on either side of the street to find whether there may be just one person who will listen to him. But the crowds hurry by

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without noticing him or his trouble. Yet it is such an immense, illimitable, grief. Should his heart break and the grief pour out, it would flow over the whole earth, so it seems, and yet no one sees it. It has managed to conceal itself in such an insignificant shell that no one can see it even by day and with a light.

Iona sees a hall porter with some sacking and decides to talk to him.

'Friend, what sort of time is it?' he asks.

'Past nine. What are you standing here for? Move on.'

Iona moves on a few steps, doubles himself up, and abandons himself to his grief. He sees it is useless to turn to people for help. In less than five minutes he straightens himself, holds up his head as if he felt some sharp pain, and gives a tug at the reins; he can bear it no longer. 'The stables,' he thinks, and the little horse, as if it understood, starts off at a trot.

About an hour and a half later, Iona is seated by a large dirty stove. Around the stove, on the floor, on the benches, people are snoring; the air is thick and suffocatingly hot. Iona looks at the sleepers, scratches himself, and regrets having returned so early.

'I have not even earned my fodder,' he thinks. 'That's what's my trouble. A man who knows his job, who has had enough to eat and his horse too, can always sleep peacefully.'

A young cabdriver, in one of the corners, half gets up, grunts sleepily, and stretches towards a bucket of water.

'Do you want a drink?' Iona asks him.

'Don't I want a drink!'

'That's so? Your good health. But listen, mate—you know, my son is dead…Did you hear? This week, in the hospital…It's a long story.'

Iona looks to see what effect his words have, but sees none—the young man has hidden his face and is fast asleep again. The old man sighs and scratches his head. Just as much as the young one wants to drink, the old man wants to talk. It will soon be a week since his son died, and he has not been able to speak about it properly to anyone. One must tell it slowly and carefully; how his son fell ill,

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how he suffered, what he said before he died, how he died. One must describe every detail of the funeral, and the journey to the hospital to fetch the dead son's clothes. His daughter, Anissia, has remained in the village—one must talk about her too. It is nothing he has to tell? Surely the listener would gasp and sigh, and sympathise with him? It is better, too, to talk to women; two words are enough to make them sob.

'I'll go and look after my horse,' thinks Iona; 'there's always time to sleep. No fear of that!'

He puts on his coat and goes to the stable to his horse; he thinks of the corn, the hay, the weather. When he is alone, he dare not think of his son; he can speak about him to anyone, but to think of him, and picture him to himself, is unbearably painful.

'Are you tucking in?' Iona asks his horse, looking at its bright eyes: 'go on, tuck in, though we've not earned our corn, we can eat hay. Yes I am too old to drive—my son could have, not I. He was a first-rate cabdriver. If only he had lived!'

Iona is silent for a moment, then continues:

'That's how it is, my old horse. There's no more Kuzma Ionitch. He has left us to live, and he went off pop. Now let's say you had a foal, you were the foal's mother and, suddenly, let's say, that foal went and left you to live after him. It would be sad, wouldn't it?'

The little horse munches, listens and breathes over its master's hand...

Iona's feelings are too much for him and he tells the little horse the whole story.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anton Chekhov (1810–1904) was born in a middle-class family in Russia. He studied medicine at Moscow University. His first short story appeared in 1880 and, in the next seven years, he produced more than

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six hundred stories. He also wrote plays— *Seagull, Uncle Vanya, The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchards* are among the more famous ones. His work greatly influenced the modern short story and drama.

The main theme of Chekov's short stories is life's pathos, caused by the inability of human beings to respond to, or even to communicate with, one another. The present story illustrates this point beautifully.

Understanding the Text

1. Comment on the indifference that meets Iona's attempts to share his grief with his fellow human beings.
2. What impression of the character of Iona do you get from this story?
3. How does the horse serve as a true friend and companion to Iona?

Talking About the Text

Discuss the following in pairs

1. Empathy and understanding are going out of modern society. The individual experiences intense alienation from the society around him or her.
2. Behind the public face of the people in various occupations is a whole saga of personal suffering and joy which they wish to share with others.

Appreciation

1. The story begins with a description of the setting. How does this serve as a fitting prelude to the events described in the story?
2. Comment on the graphic detail with which the various passengers who took Iona's cab are described.
3. This short story revolves around a single important event. Discuss how the narrative is woven around this central fact.
4. The story begins and ends with Iona and his horse. Comment on the significance of this to the plot of the story.

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Language Work

1. Look at the following set of words and mention what is common to them both in form and meaning

snuffle	snort	sniffle	snore

2. Look at the words given in the box below

snigger	wriggle	sneak	squeak
squawk	titter	pant	chuckle
giggle	jeer	chortle	guffaw
sigh	sidle	boo	shriek
scramble	croak	straggle	plod
gasp			

Now classify them according to their closeness in meaning to the words given below

A	B	C	D	E
snigger	**wriggle**	**squeak**	**jeer**	**sigh**

3. Explain the associations that the colour 'white' has in the story.
4. What does the phrase 'as if he were on needles' mean? Can you think of another phrase with a similar meaning substituting the word 'needles'?

Suggested Reading

1. 'What Men Live by' by Leo Tolstoy
2. 'The Overcoat' by N. Gogol.

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2 A Pair of Mustachios

Mulk Raj Anand

☛ *Guess the meaning of these expressions from the context*

nouveau riche	commercial bourgeoise
blue blood	the bluff of a rascal
asked sourly	goods and chattels

There are various kinds of mustachios worn in my country to mark the boundaries between the various classes of people. Outsiders may think it stupid to lay down, or rather to raise, lines of demarcation of this kind, but we are notorious in the whole world for sticking to our queer old conventions, prides and prejudices, even as the Chinese or the Americans or, for that matter, the English... And, at any rate, some people may think it easier and more convenient to wear permanent boundary-lines, like mustachios, which only need a smear of grease to keep them bright and shiny, rather than to wear frock coats, striped trousers and top hats, which constantly need to be laundered and dry-cleaned, and the maintenance of which is already leading to the bankruptcy of the European ruling classes. With them clothes make the man but, to us, mustachios make the man. So we prefer the various styles of mustachios to mark the differences between the classes.

And very unique and poetical symbols they are too. For instance, there is the famous lion moustache, the fearsome upstanding symbol of that great order of resplendent rajas, maharajas, nawabs and English army generals who are so well known for their devotion to the King Emperor. Then there is the tiger moustache, the uncanny, several-pointed moustache worn by the unbending, unchanging survivals from the ranks of the

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feudal gentry who have nothing left but pride in their greatness and a few mementoes of past glory, scrolls of honour granted by the former emperors, a few gold trinkets, heirlooms and bits of land. Next there is the goat moustache—a rather unsure brand, worn by the nouveau riche, the new commercial bourgeoisie and the shopkeeper class who somehow don't belong—an indifferent, thin little line of a moustache, worn so that its tips can be turned up or down as the occasion demands—a show of power to some coolie or humility to a prosperous client. There is the Charlie Chaplin moustache worn by the lower middle class, by clerks and professional men, a kind of half-and-half affair, deliberately designed as a compromise between the traditional full moustache and the clean-shaven Curzon cut of the sahibs like them to keep mustachios at all. There is the sheep moustache of the coolies and the lower orders, the mouse moustache of the peasants, and so on.

In fact, there are endless styles of mustachios, all appropriate to the wearers and indicative of the various orders, as rigorously adhered to as if they had all been patented by the Government of India or had been sanctioned by special appointment with His Majesty, the King, or Her Majesty, the Queen. And any poaching on the style of one class by members of another is resented, and the rising ratio of murders in my country is interpreted by certain authorities as being indicative of the increasing jealousy with which each class is guarding its rights and privileges in regard to the mark of the mustachio.

Of course, the analysis of the expert is rather too abstract and not all the murders can be traced to this cause but, certainly, it is true that the preferences of the people in regard to their mustachios are causing a lot of trouble in our parts.

For instance, there was a rumpus in my own village the other day about a pair of mustachios.

It so happened that Seth Ramanand, the grocer and moneylender, who had been doing well out of the recent fall in the price of wheat by buying up whole crops cheap from the hard-pressed peasants and then selling them at higher prices, took it into his head to twist the goat

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moustache, integral to his order and position in society, at the tips, so that it looked nearly like a tiger moustache.

Nobody seemed to mind very much because most of the mouse-moustached peasants in our village are beholden to the local moneylender, either because they owe him interest on a loan, or an instalment on a mortgage of jewellery or land. Besides, the Seth had been careful enough to twist his moustache so that it seemed nearly, though not quite, like a tiger moustache.

But there lives in the vicinity of our village, in an old dilapidated Moghul style house, a *mussulman* named Khan Azam Khan, who claims descent from an ancient Afghan family whose heads were noblemen and councillors in the court of the great Moghuls. Khan Azam Khan, a tall, middle-aged man, is a handsome and dignified person, and he wears a tiger moustache and remains adorned with the faded remnants of a gold-brocaded waistcoat, though he hasn't even a patch of land left.

Some people, notably the landlord of our village and the moneylender, maliciously say that he is an impostor, and that all his talk about his blue blood is merely the bluff of a rascal. Others, like the priest of the temple, concede that his ancestors were certainly attached to the Court of the Great Moghuls, but as sweepers. The landlord, the moneylender and the priest are manifestly jealous of anyone's long ancestry, however, because they have all risen from nothing—and it is obvious from the stately ruins around Khan Azam Khan what grace was once his and his forefathers. Only Khan Azam Khan's pride is greatly in excess of his present possessions and he is inordinately jealous of his old privileges and rather foolish and headstrong in safeguarding every sacred brick of his tottering house against vandalism.

Khan Azam Khan happened to go to the moneylender's shop to pawn his wife's gold nose-ring one morning and he noticed the upturning tendency of the hair on Ramanand's upper lip which made the moneylender's goat moustache look almost like his own tiger moustache.

'Since when have the lentil-eating shopkeepers become noblemen?' he asked sourly.

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'I don't know what you mean, Khan', Ramanand answered.

'You know what I mean, seed of a donkey!' said the Khan. Look at the way you have turned the tips of your moustache upwards. It almost looks like my tiger moustache. Turn the tips down to the style proper to the goat that you are! Fancy the airs of people nowadays!'

'Oh, Khan, don't get so excited,' said the moneylender, who was nothing if he was not amenable, having built up his business on the maxim that the customer is always right.

'I tell you, turn the tip of your moustache down if you value your life!' raged Khan Azam Khan.

'If that is all the trouble, here you are', said Ramanand, brushing one end of his moustache with his oily hand so that it dropped like a dead fly. 'Come, show me the trinkets. How much do you want for them?'

Now that Khan Azam Khan's pride was appeased, he was like soft wax in the merchant's sure hand. His need, and the need of his family, for food, was great and he humbly accepted the value which the moneylender put on his wife's nose-ring.

But as he was departing, after negotiating his business, he noticed that though one end of the moneylender's moustache had come down at his behest, the other end was still up.

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'A strange trick you have played on me, you swine,' the Khan said.

'I have paid you the best value for your trinket, Khan, that any moneylender will pay in these parts,' he said, 'especially in these days when the sarkars of the whole world are threatening to go off the gold standard.'

'It has nothing to do with the trinket,' said Azam Khan, 'but one end of your moustache is still up like my tiger moustache though you have brought down the other to your proper goat's style. Bring that other end down also so that there is no aping by your moustache of mine.'

'Now Khan,' said the moneylender, 'I humbled myself because you are doing business with me. You can't expect me to become a mere worm just because you have pawned a trinket with me. If you were pledging some more expensive jewellery I might consider obliging you a little more. Anyhow, my humble milk-skimmer doesn't look a bit like your valiant tiger moustache.'

'Bring that tip down!' Khan Azam Khan roared, for, the more he had looked at the moneylender's moustache the more the still upturned tip seemed to him like an effort at an imitation of his own.

'Now, be sensible, Khan,' the moneylender said, waving his hand with an imperturbable calm.

'I tell you, turn that tip down or I shall wring your neck,' said the Khan.

'All right, the next time you come to do business with me, I shall bring that tip down,' answered the moneylender cunningly.

'That is fair,' said Chaudhary Chottu Ram, the landlord of the village, who was sitting under the tree opposite.

'To be sure! To be sure!' some peasants chimed in sheepishly.

Khan Azam Khan managed to control his murderous impulses and walked away. But he could not quell his pride, the pride of generations of his ancestors who had worn the tiger moustache as a mark of their high position. To see the symbol of his honour imitated by a moneylender—this was too much for him. He went home and fetched a necklace which had come down to his family

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through seven generations and, placing it before the moneylender, said:

'Now will you bring that tip of your moustache down?'

'By all means, Khan,' said the moneylender. 'But let us see about this necklace. How much do you want for it?'

'Any price will do, so long as you bring the tip of your moustache down,' answered Azam Khan.

After they had settled the business, the moneylender said: 'Now Khan, I shall carry out your will.' And he ceremoniously brushed the upturned tip of his moustache down.

As Azam Khan was walking away, however, he noticed that the other tip of the moneylender's moustache had now gone up and stood dubiously like the upturned end of his own exalted tiger moustache. He turned on his feet and shouted:

'I shall kill you if you don't brush that moustache into the shape appropriate to your position as a lentil-eating moneylender!'

'Now, now, Khan, come to your senses. You know it is only the illusion of a tiger's moustache and nowhere like your brave and wonderful adornment,' said the greasy moneylender.

'I tell you I won't have you insulting the insignia of my order!' shouted Azam Khan. 'You bring that tip down!'

'I wouldn't do it, Khan, even if you pawned all the jewellery you possess to me,' said the moneylender.

'I would rather lose all my remaining worldly possessions, my pots and pans, my clothes, even my house, than see the tip of your moustache turned up like that!' spluttered Azam Khan.

'*Achcha*, if you care so little for all your goods and chattels you sell them to me and then I shall turn that tip of my moustache down,' said the moneylender. 'And what is more, I shall keep it flat. Now, is that a bargain?'

'That seems fair enough,' said the landlord from under the tree where he was preparing for a siesta.

'But what proof have I that you will keep your word?' said Azam Khan. 'You oily lentil-eaters never keep your promises.'

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'We shall draw up a deed, here and now,' said the moneylender. 'And we shall have it signed by the five elders of the village who are seated under that tree. What more do you want?'

'Now, there is no catch in that,' put in the landlord. 'I and four other elders will come to court as witnesses on your behalf if he doesn't keep his moustache to the goat style ever afterwards.'

'I shall excommunicate him from religion if he doesn't keep his word,' added the priest, who had arrived on the scene on hearing the hubbub.

'*Achcha*,' agreed Azam Khan.

And he forthwith had a deed prepared by the petition writer of the village, who sat smoking his hubble-bubble under the tree. And this document, transferring all his household goods and chattels, was signed in the presence of the five elders of the village and sealed. And the moneylender forthwith brought both tips of his moustache down and kept them glued in the goat style appropriate to his order.

Only, as soon as Khan Azam Khan's back was turned he muttered to the peasants seated nearby: 'My father was a Sultan.'

And they laughed to see the Khan give a special twist to his moustache as he walked away maintaining the valiant uprightness to the symbol of his ancient and noble family, though he had become a pauper.

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About the Author

Mulk Raj Anand (1905–2004), one of the most celebrated Indian novelists who wrote in English, was born in Peshawar and educated at the universities of Lahore, London and Cambridge.

His novels include *The Untouchable, Coolie, The Sword and the Sickle, Private Life of an Indian Prince, Seven Summers* and *Morning Face.* He also published a number of short stories which reveal a lively sense of humour, a keen eye for the pretensions of the people and a feeling of warm compassion.

Understanding the Text

1. What do you understand of the natures of Ramanand and Azam Khan from the episode described?
2. Identify instances in the story that show the business acumen of Ramanand.
3. Both Ramanand and Azam Khan seem to have very fixed views. How does Ramanand score over Azam Khan towards the end of the story?

Talking About the Text

Discuss the following in groups of three or four

1. The episode has been narrated in a light vein. What social mores does the author seem to ridicule?
2. What do you think are the reasons for the references made to the English people and the British monarchy?
3. What do you think is the message that the author seems to convey through the story?

   Compare your group's views with that of the other groups.

Appreciation

1. Comment on the way in which the theme of the story has been introduced.
2. How does the insertion of dialogue in the story contribute to its interest?

Language Work

1. *Nouveau riche* and *bourgeoise* are French words. Collect from newspapers, magazines and other sources some more French words or expressions that are commonly used in English.
2. Locate expressions in the text which reflect the Indian idiom, for example, the pride of the generations of his ancestors.
3. We 'draw up a deed'. Complete the following phrases with appropriate words

   a. ..... one's word
   b. ..... one's will
   c. ..... ends meet
   d. ..... a loan
   e. .....a deaf ear to

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SUGGESTED READING

1. *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* by Mulk Raj Anand.

☞ *Read and Enjoy*

MAY THE BEST BEARD WIN

HANDLEBAR HEROES: There were men with Fu Manchu moustaches and contestants with long flowing Gandalf beards.

Some 220 contestants from all over the world have gathered in Berlin for Saturday's biannual world beard and moustache championships.

THE WACKIER THE BETTER: German Elmar Weisser supports a Brandenburg Gate on his chin. Countryman Juergen Reinl's spikes give porcupines a complex. And, finally, grandpa Willi Chevalier is in a class of his own.

BUT BEAT THIS SANTA : Entrants in the freestyle section turned up with Christmas tree beards.

From the *Hindustan Times*, 2-10-05.

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3 The Rocking-horse Winner

D.H. Lawrence

☛ *Look for these expressions in the story and guess the meaning from the context*

turned to dust	careered
sequin	overwrought
reiterated	brazening it out

There was a woman who was beautiful, who started with all the advantages, yet she had no luck. She married for love and love turned to dust. She had bonny children, yet, she felt they had been thrust upon her and she could not love them. They looked at her coldly as if they were finding fault with her. And hurriedly she felt she must cover up some fault in herself. Yet what it was that she must cover up she never knew. Nevertheless, when her children were present, she always felt the centre of her heart go hard. This troubled her and, in her manner, she was all the more gentle and anxious for her children as if she loved them very much. Only she herself knew that at the centre of her heart was a hard little place that could not feel love, no, not for anybody. Everybody else said of her: 'She is such a good mother. She adores her children.' Only she herself, and her children themselves, knew it was not so. They read it in each other's eyes.

There were a boy and two little girls. They lived in a pleasant house, with a garden, and they had discreet servants, and felt themselves superior to anyone in the neighbourhood.

Although they lived in style, they felt always an anxiety in the house. There was never enough money.

The mother had a small income and the father had a small income but not nearly enough for the social position

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which they had to keep up. The father went into town to some office. But though he had good prospects, these prospects never materialised. There was always the grinding sense of the shortage of money though the style was always kept up.

At last the mother said: 'I will see if I can't make something.' But she did not know where to begin. She racked her brains, and tried this thing and the other but could not find anything successful. The failure made deep lines come into her face. Her children were growing up; they would have to go to school. There must be more money, there must be more money. The father, who was always very handsome and expensive in his tastes, seemed as if he never would be able to do anything worth doing. And the mother, who had a great belief in herself, did not succeed any better, and her tastes were just as expensive.

And so the house came to be haunted by the unspoken phrase: 'There must be more money! There must be more money!' The children could hear it all the time, though nobody said it aloud. They heard it at Christmas, when expensive and splendid toys filled the nursery. Behind the shining modern rocking-horse, behind the smart doll's house, a voice would start whispering: 'There must be more money! There must be more money!' And the children would stop playing, to listen for a moment. They would look into each other's eyes to see if they had all heard. And each one saw in the eyes of the other two that they too had heard. 'There must be more money! There must be more money!'

It came whispering from the springs of the still-swaying rocking-horse and even the horse, bending his wooden, champing head, heard it. The big doll, sitting so pink and smirking in her new pram, could hear it quite plainly and seemed to be smirking all the more self-consciously because of it. The foolish puppy, too, that took the place of the teddy-bear, he was looking so extraordinarily foolish for no other reason but that he heard the secret whisper all over the house: 'There must be more money!'

Yet nobody ever said it aloud. The whisper was everywhere and therefore no one spoke it. Just as no one

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ever says 'we are breathing' in spite of the fact that breath is coming and going all the time.

'Mother,' said the boy Paul one day, 'why don't we keep a car of our own? Why do we always use uncle's, or else a taxi?'

'Because we're the poor members of the family,' said the mother.

'But why are we, mother?'

'Well—I suppose,' she said slowly and bitterly, 'it's because your father has no luck.'

The boy was silent for some time.

'Is luck money, mother?' he asked, rather timidly.

'No, Paul, not quite. It's what causes you to have money.'

'Oh!', said Paul vaguely. 'I thought when Uncle Oscar said filthy lucre, it meant money.'

'Filthy lucre does mean money,' said the mother. 'But it's lucre, not luck.'

'Oh,' said the boy. 'Then what is luck, mother?'

'It's what causes you to have money. If you're lucky you have money. That's why it's better to be born lucky than rich. If you're rich, you may lose your money. But if you're lucky, you will always get more money.'

'Oh! Will you? And is father not lucky?'

'Very unlucky, I should say,' she said bitterly.

The boy watched her with unsure eyes.

'Why?' he asked.

'I don't know. Nobody ever knows why one person is lucky and another unlucky.'

'Do they? Nobody at all? Does nobody know?'

'Perhaps God. But He never tells.'

'He ought to, then. And aren't you lucky either, mother?'

'I can't be, if I married an unlucky husband.'

'But by yourself, aren't you?'

'I used to think I was, before I married. Now I think I am very unlucky indeed.'

'Why?'

'Well—never mind! Perhaps I'm not really,' she said. The child looked at her to see if she meant it. But he saw, by the lines of her mouth, that she was only trying to hide something from him.

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'Well, anyhow,' he said stoutly, 'I'm a lucky person.'

'Why?' said his mother, with a sudden laugh.

He stared at her. He didn't even know why he had said it.

'God told me,' he asserted, brazening it out.

'1 hope He did, dear,' she said, again with a laugh, but rather bitter.

'He did, mother!'

'Excellent!' said the mother, using one of her husband's exclamations.

The boy saw she did not believe him; or rather, that she paid no attention to his assertion. This angered him somewhat and made him want to compel her attention.

He went off by himself, vaguely, in a childish way, seeking for the clue to 'luck'. Absorbed, taking no heed of other people, he went about with a sort of stealth, seeking inwardly for luck. He wanted luck. He wanted it, he wanted it. When the two girls were playing dolls in the nursery, he would sit on his big rocking-horse, charging madly into space, with a frenzy that made the little girls peer at him uneasily. Wildly the horse careered. The waving dark hair of the boy tossed, his eyes had a strange glare in them. The little girls dared not speak to him.

When he had ridden to the end of his mad little journey, he climbed down and stood in front of his rocking-horse, staring fixedly into its lowered face. Its red mouth was slightly open, its big eye was wide and glassy-bright.

'Now!' he would silently command the snorting steed. 'Now, take me to where there is luck. Now take me!'

And he would slash the horse on the neck with the little whip he had asked Uncle Oscar for. He knew the horse could take him to where there was luck if only he forced it. So he would mount again and start on his furious ride, hoping at last to get there. He knew he could get there.

'You'll break your horse, Paul!' said the nurse.

'He's always riding like that, I wish he'd leave off ', said his sister, Joan.

But he only glared down on them in silence. Nurse gave him up. She could make nothing of him. Anyhow, he was growing beyond her.

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One day his mother and his Uncle Oscar came in when he was on one of his furious rides. He did not speak to them.

'Hello, you young jockey! Riding a winner?' said his uncle.

'Aren't you growing too big for a rocking-horse? You're not a very little boy any longer, you know,' said his mother.

But Paul only gave a blue glare from his big, rather close-set eyes. He would speak to nobody when he was in full tilt. His mother watched him with an anxious expression on her face.

At last he suddenly stopped forcing his horse into the mechanical gallop and slid down.

'Well, I got there,' he announced fiercely, his blue eyes still flaring and his sturdy long legs straddling apart.

'Where did you get to?' asked his mother.

'Where I wanted to go,' he flared back at her.

'That's right, son!' said Uncle Oscar, 'Don't you stop till you get there. What's the horse's name?'

'He doesn't have a name,' said the boy.

'Gets on without all right?' asked the uncle.

'Well, he has different names. He was called Sansovino last week.'

'Sansovino, eh? Won the Ascot. How did you know his name?'

'He always talks about horse-races with Bassett,' said Joan.

The uncle was delighted to find that his small nephew was posted with all the racing news. Bassett, the young gardener, who had been wounded in the left foot in the war and had got his present job through Oscar Cresswell whose batman he had been, was a perfect blade of the 'turf'. He lived in the racing events, and the small boy lived with him.

Oscar Cresswell got it all from Bassett.

'Master Paul comes and asks me so I can't do more than tell him, sir,' said Bassett, his face terribly serious, as if he were speaking of religious matters.

'And does he ever put anything on a horse he fancies?' 'Well—I don't want to give him away—he's a young sport, a

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fine sport, sir. Would you mind asking himself? He sort of takes a pleasure in it and perhaps he'd feel I was giving him away, sir, if you don't mind.'

Bassett was serious as a church.

The uncle went back to his nephew and took him off for a ride in the car.

'Say, Paul, old man, do you ever put anything on a horse?' the uncle asked.

The boy watched the handsome man closely.

'Why, do you think I oughtn't to?' he parried.

'Not a bit of it! I thought perhaps you might give me a tip for the Lincoln.'

The car sped on into the country, going down to Uncle Oscar's place in Hampshire.

'Honour bright?' said the nephew.

'Honour bright, son!' said the uncle.

'Well, then, Daffodil.'

'Daffodil! I doubt it, sonny. What about Mirza?'

'I only know the winner,' said the boy. 'That's Daffodil.'

'Daffodil, eh?'

There was a pause. Daffodil was an obscure horse comparatively.

'Uncle!'

'Yes, son?'

'You won't let it go any further, will you? I promised Bassett.'

'Bassett be damned, old man! What's he got to do with it?'

'We're partners. We've been partners from the first. Uncle, he lent me my first five shillings which I lost. I promised him. Honour bright, it was only between me and him; only you gave me that ten-shilling note I started winning with so I thought you were lucky. You won't let it go any further, will you?'

The boy gazed at his uncle from those big, hot, blue eyes, set rather close together. The uncle stirred and laughed uneasily.

'Right you are, son! I'll keep your tip private. Daffodil, eh? How much are you putting on him?'

'All except twenty pounds,' said the boy. 'I keep that in reserve.'

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The uncle thought it a good joke.

'You keep twenty pounds in reserve, do you, you young romancer? What are you betting, then?'

I'm betting three hundred,' said the boy gravely. 'But it's between you and me Uncle Oscar! Honour bright?'

The uncle burst into a roar of laughter.

'It's between you and me all right, you young Nat Gould,' he said, laughing. 'But where's your three hundred?'

'Bassett keeps it for me. We're partners.'

'You are, are you? And what is Bassett putting on Daffodil?'

'He won't go quite as high as I do, I expect. Perhaps he'll go a hundred and fifty.'

'What pennies?' laughed the uncle.

'Pounds,' said the child, with a surprised look at his uncle.

'Bassett keeps a bigger reserve than I do.' Between wonder and amusement, Uncle Oscar was silent. He pursued that matter no further but he determined to take his nephew with him to the Lincoln races.

'Now, son,' he said, 'I'm putting twenty on Mirza and I'll put five on for you on any horse you fancy. What's your pick?'

'Daffodil, uncle.'

'No, not the fiver on Daffodil.'

'I should if it was my own fiver,' said the child.

'Good! Good! Right you are! A fiver for me and a fiver for you on Daffodil.'

The child had never been to a race-meeting before, and his eyes were blue fire. He pursed his mouth tight and watched. A Frenchman, just in front, had put his money on Lancelot. Wild with excitement, he flayed his arms up and down, yelling 'Lancelot! Lancelot!' in his French accent. Daffodil came in first, Lancelot second, Mirza third. The child, flushed and with eyes blazing, was curiously serene. His uncle brought him four five-pound notes, four to one.

'What am I to do with these?' he cried, waving them before the boy's eyes.

"I suppose we'll talk to Bassett,' said the boy. 'I expect I have fifteen hundred now and twenty in reserve; and this twenty.'

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His uncle studied him for some moments.

'Look here, son!' he said, 'You're not serious about Bassett and that fIfteen hundred, are you?'

'Yes, I am. But it's between you and me, uncle. Honour bright?'

'Honour bright all right, son! But I must talk to Bassett.'

'If you'd like to be a partner, uncle, with Bassett and me, we could all be partners. Only, you'd have to promise, Honour bright, uncle, not to let it go beyond us three. Bassett and I are lucky, and you must be lucky, because it was your ten shillings I started winning with...'

Uncle Oscar took both Bassett and Paul into Richmond Park for an afternoon, and there they talked.

'It's like this, you see, sir,' Bassett said. 'Master Paul would get me talking about racing events, spinning yarns, you know, sir. And he was always keen on knowing if I'd made or if I'd lost. It's about a year since now that I put five shillings on Blush of Dawn for him; and we lost. Then the luck turned, with that ten shillings he had from you: that we put on Singhalese. And since that time, it's been pretty steady, all things considering. 'What do you say, Master Paul?'

'We're all right when we're sure,' said Paul. 'It's when we're not quite sure that we go down.'

'Oh, but we're careful then,' said Bassett.

'But when are you sure?' smiled Uncle Oscar.

'It's Master Paul, sir,' said Bassett in a secret, religious voice. 'It's as if he had it from heaven. Like Daffodil, now, for the Lincoln. That was as sure as eggs.'

'Did you put anything on Daffodil?' asked Oscar Cresswell.

'Yes, sir. I made my bit.'

'And my nephew?'

Bassett was obstinately silent, looking at Paul.

'I made twelve hundred, didn't I, Bassett? I told uncle I was putting three hundred on Daffodil.'

'That's right,' said Bassett, nodding.

'But where's the money?' asked the uncle.

'I keep it safe locked up, sir. Master Paul, he can have it any minute he likes to ask for it.'

'What, fifteen hundred pounds?'

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'And twenty. And forty, that is, with the twenty he made on the course.'

'It's amazing,' said the uncle.

'If Master Paul offers you to be partners, sir, I would, if I were you: if you'll excuse me,' said Bassett.

Oscar Cresswell thought about it.

'I'll see the money,' he said.

They drove home again and, sure enough, Bassett came round to the garden-house with fifteen hundred pounds in notes. The twenty pounds reserve was left with Joe Gleen, in the Turf Commission deposit.

'You see, it's all right, uncle, when I'm sure. Then we go strong, for all we're worth. Don't we, Bassett?'

'We do that, Master Paul.'

'And when are you sure?' said the uncle, laughing.

'Oh, well, sometimes I'm absolutely sure, like about Daffodil,' said the boy; 'and sometimes I have an idea; and sometimes I haven't even an idea, have I, Bassett? Then we're careful, because we mostly go down.'

'You do, do you? And when you're sure, like about Daffodil, what makes you sure, sonny?'

'Oh, well, I don't know,' said the boy uneasily. 'I'm sure, you know, uncle; that's all.'

'It's as if he had it from heaven, sir,' Bassett reiterated.

'I should say so!' said the uncle.

But he became a partner. And when the Leger was coming on, Paul was 'sure' about Lively Spark which was a quite inconsiderable horse. The boy insisted on putting a thousand on the horse, Bassett went for five hundred and Oscar Cresswell two hundred. Lively Spark came in first and the betting had been ten to one against him. Paul had made ten thousand.

'You see,' he said, 'I was absolutely sure of him.'

Even Oscar Cresswell had cleared two thousand.

'Look here, son,' he said, 'this sort of thing makes me nervous.'

'It needn't, uncle! Perhaps I shan't be sure again for a long time.'

'But what are you going to do with your money?' asked the uncle.

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'Of course,' said the boy, 'I started it for mother. She said she had no luck because father is unlucky, so I thought if I was lucky, it might stop whispering.'

'What might stop whispering?'

'Our house. I hate our house for whispering.'

'What does it whisper?'

'Why—why—' the boy fidgeted—'why, I don't know. But it's always short of money, you know, uncle.'

'I know it, son, I know it.'

'You know people send mother writs, don't you, uncle?'

'I'm afraid I do,' said the uncle.

'And then the house whispers, like people laughing at you behind your back. It's awful, that is why I thought if I was lucky—'

'You might stop it,' added the uncle.

The boy watched him with big blue eyes that had an uncanny cold fire in them, and he said never a word.

'Well, then,' said the uncle. 'What are we doing?'

'I shouldn't like mother to know I was lucky,' said the boy.

'Why not, son?'

'She'd stop me.'

'I don't think she would.'

'Oh!'—and the boy writhed in an odd way—'I don't want her to know, uncle.'

'All right, son! We'll manage it without her knowing.' They managed it very easily. Paul, at the other's suggestion, handed over five thousand pounds to his uncle, who deposited it with the family lawyer, who was then to inform Paul's mother that a relative had put five thousand pounds into his hands, which sum was to be paid out a thousand pounds at a time, on the mother's birthday, for the next five years.

'So she'll have a birthday present of a thousand pounds for five successive years,' said Uncle Oscar. 'I hope it won't make it all the harder for her later.'

'Paul's mother had her birthday in November. The house had been 'whispering' worse than ever lately and, even in spite of his luck, Paul could not bear up against it. He was very anxious to see the effect of

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the birthday letter telling his mother about the thousand pounds.

When there were no visitors, Paul now took his meals with his parents as he was beyond the nursery control. His mother went into town nearly every day. She had discovered that she had an odd knack of sketching furs and dress materials, so she worked secretly in the studio of a friend who was the chief 'artist' for the leading drapers. She drew the figures of ladies in furs and ladies in silk and sequins for the newspaper advertisements. This young woman artist earned several thousand pounds a year; but Paul's mother only made several hundreds and she was again dissatisfied. She so wanted to be first in something, and she did not succeed, even in making sketches for drapery advertisements.

She was down to breakfast on the morning of her birthday. Paul watched her face as she read her letters. He knew the lawyer's letter. As his mother read it, her face hardened and became more expressionless. Then, a cold determined look came on her mouth. She hid the letter under the pile of others and said not a word about it.

'Didn't you have anything nice in the post for your birthday, mother?' said Paul.

'Quite moderately nice,' she said, her voice cold and absent.

She went away to town without saying more.

But in the afternoon Uncle Oscar appeared. He said Paul's mother had had a long interview with the lawyer, asking if the whole five thousand could not be advanced at once, as she was in debt.

'What do you think, uncle?' said the boy.

'I leave it to you, son.'

'Oh, let her have it, then! We can get some more with the other,' said the boy.

'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, laddie!' said Uncle Oscar.

'But I'm sure to know for the Grand National; or the Lincolnshire; or else the Derby. I'm sure to know for one of them,' said Paul.

So Uncle Oscar signed the agreement and Paul's mother touched the whole five thousand. Then something very

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curious happened. The voices in the house suddenly went mad, like a chorus of frogs on a spring evening. There were certain new furnishings, and Paul had a tutor. He was really going to Eton, his father's school, in the following autumn. There were flowers in the winter and a blossoming of the luxury Paul's mother had been used to. And yet the voices in the house, behind the sprays of mimosa and almond-blossoms, and from under the piles of iridescent cushions, simply trilled and screamed in a sort of ecstasy: 'There must be more money! Oh-h-h! There must be more money! Oh, now, now-w! Now-w-w there must be more money—more than ever! More than ever!'

It frightened Paul terribly. He studied away at his Latin and Greek with his tutor. But his intense hours were spent with Bassett. The Grand National had gone by; he had not 'known,' and had lost a hundred pounds. Summer was at hand. He was in agony for the Lincoln. But even for the Lincoln he didn't 'know,' and he lost fifty pounds. He became wild-eyed and strange as if something were going to explode in him.

'Let it alone, son! Don't you bother about it,' urged Uncle Oscar. But it was as if the boy couldn't really hear what his uncle was saying.

'I've got to know for the Derby! I've got to know for the Derby!' the child reiterated, his big blue eyes blazing with a sort of madness.

His mother noticed how overwrought he was.

You'd better go to the seaside. Wouldn't you like to go now to the seaside, instead of waiting? I think you'd better,' she said, looking down at him anxiously, her heart curiously heavy because of him.

But the child lifted his uncanny blue eyes.

'I couldn't possibly go before the Derby, mother!' he said. 'I couldn't possibly!'

'Why not?' she said, her voice becoming heavy when she was opposed. 'Why not? You can still go from the seaside to see the Derby with your Uncle Oscar, if that's what you wish. No need for you to wait here. Besides, I think you care too much about these races. It's a bad sign. My family had been a gambling family and you won't know till you

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grow up how much damage it has done. But it has done damage. I shall have to send Bassett away and ask Uncle Oscar not to talk racing to you, unless you promise to be reasonable about it: go away to the seaside and forget it. You're all nerves!'

'I'll do what you like, mother, so long as you don't send me away till after the Derby', the boy said.

'Send you away from where? Just from this house?'

'Yes,' he said, gazing at her.

'Why, you curious child, what makes you care about this house so much, suddenly? I never knew you loved it.'

He gazed at her without speaking. He had a secret within a secret, something he had not divulged, even to Bassett or to his Uncle Oscar.

But his mother, after standing undecided and a little bit sullen for some moments, said:

'Very well, then! Don't go to the seaside till after the Derby, if you don't wish it. But promise me you won't let your nerves go to pieces. Promise you won't think so much about horse-racing and events, as you call them.'

'Oh, no,' said the boy casually. 'I won't think much about them, mother. You needn't worry. I wouidn't worry, mother, if I were you.'

'If you were me and I were you,' said his mother, 'I wonder what we should do!'

'But you know you needn't worry, mother, don't you?' the boy repeated.

'I should be awfully glad to know it,' she said wearily.

'Oh, well, you can, you know, I mean, you ought to know, you needn't worry,' he insisted.

'Ought I? Then I'll see about it,' she said.

Paul's secret of secrets was his wooden horse, that which had no name. Since he was emancipated from a nurse and a nursery-governess, he had had his rocking-horse removed to his own bedroom at the top of the house.

'Surely you're too big for a rocking-horse', his mother had remonstrated.

'Well, you see, mother, till I can have a real horse, I like to have some sort of animal about,' had been his quaint answer.

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'Do you feel he keeps you company?' She laughed.

'Oh, yes! He's very good, he always keeps me company when I'm there,' said Paul.

So the horse, rather shabby, stood in an arrested prance in the boy's bedroom.

The Derby was drawing near and the boy grew more and more tense. He hardly heard what was spoken to him, he was very frail, and his eyes were really uncanny. His mother had sudden strange seizures of uneasiness about him. Sometimes for half an hour, she would feel a sudden anxiety about him that was almost anguish. She wanted to rush to him at once and know that he was safe.

Two nights before the Derby, she was at a big party in town, when one of her rushes of anxiety about her boy, her fIrstborn, gripped her heart till she could hardly speak. She fought with the feeling, might and main, for she believed in common sense. But it was too strong. She had to leave the dance and go downstairs to telephone to the country. The children's nursery-governess was terribly surprised and startled at being rung up in the night.

'Are the children all right, Miss Wilmot?'

'Oh yes, they are quite all right.'

'Master Paul? Is he all right?'

'He went to bed as right as a trivet. Shall I run up and look at him?'

'No,' said Paul's mother reluctantly. 'No. Don't trouble. It's all right. Don't sit up. We shall be home fairly soon.' She did not want her son's privacy intruded upon.

'Very good,' said the governess.

It was about one o'clock when Paul's mother and father drove up to their house. All was still. Paul's mother went to her room and slipped off her white fur cloak. She had told her maid not to wait up for her. She heard her husband downstairs, mixing a whisky and soda.

And then, because of the strange anxiety at her heart, she stole upstairs to her son's room. Noiselessly she went along the upper corridor. Was there a faint noise? What was it?

She stood, with arrested muscles, outside his door, listening. There was a strange, heavy and yet not loud

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noise. Her heart stood still. It was a soundless noise, yet rushing and powerful. Something huge in violent, hushed motion. What was it? What in God's name was it? She ought to know. She felt that she knew the noise. She knew what it was.

Yet she could not place it. She couldn't say what it was. And on and on it went, like a madness.

Softly, frozen with anxiety and fear, she turned the door handle.

The room was dark. Yet in the space near the window, she heard and saw something move to and fro. She gazed in fear and amazement.

Then suddenly she switched on the light and saw her son, in his green pyjamas, madly surging on the rocking-horse. The blaze of light suddenly lit him up, as he urged the wooden horse, and lit her up, as she stood, blonde, in her dress of pale green and crystal in the doorway.

'Paul,' she cried. 'Whatever are you doing?'

'It's Malabar!' he screamed in a powerful, strange voice. It's Malabar!'

His eyes blazed at her for one strange and senseless second, as he ceased urging his wooden horse. Then he fell with a crash to the ground and she, all her tormented motherhood flooding upon her, rushed to gather him up.

But he was unconscious, and unconscious he remained, with some brain-fever. He talked and tossed, and his mother sat stonily by his side.

'Malabar! It's Malabar! Bassett! Bassett, I know! It's Malabar!'

So the child cried, trying to get up and urge the rocking-horse that gave him his inspiration.

'What does he mean by Malabar?' asked the heart-frozen mother. 'I don't know,' said the father stonily.

'What does he mean by Malabar?' she asked her brother Oscar.

'It's one of the horses running for the Derby,' was the answer.

And, in spite of himself, Oscar Cresswell spoke to Bassett, and himself put a thousand on Malabar: at fourteen to one.

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The third day of the illness was critical: they were waiting for a change. The boy, with his rather long, curly hair, was tossing ceaselessly on the pillow. He neither slept nor regained consciousness, and his eyes were like blue stones. His mother sat, feeling her heart had gone, turned actually into a stone.

In the evening, Oscar Cresswell did not come, but Bassett sent a message, saying could he come up for a moment, just one moment? Paul's mother was very angry at the intrusion but, on second thought, she agreed. The boy was the same. Perhaps Bassett might bring him to consciousness.

The gardener, a shortish fellow with a little brown moustache and sharp little brown eyes, tiptoed into the room, touched his imaginary cap to Paul's mother, and stole to the bedside, staring with glittering, smallish eyes at the tossing, dying child.

'Master Paul,' he whispered, 'Master Paul! Malabar came in first all right, a clean win. I did as you told me. You've made over seventy thousand pounds, you have; you've got over eighty thousand. Malabar came in all right, Master Paul.'

'Malabar! Malabar! Did I say Malabar, mother? Did I say Malabar? Do you think I'm lucky, mother? I knew Malabar, didn't I? Over eighty thousand pounds! I call that lucky, don't you, mother? Over eighty thousand pounds! I knew, didn't I know I knew? Malabar came in all right. If I ride my horse till I'm sure, then I tell you, Bassett, you can go as high as you like. Did you go for all you were worth, Bassett?

'I went a thousand on it, Master Paul.'

'I never told you, mother, that if I can ride my horse, and get there, then I'm absolutely sure—oh, absolutely mother, did I ever tell you? I am lucky!'

'No, you never did,' said his mother.

But the boy died in the night.

And even as he lay dead, his mother heard her brother's voice saying to her: 'My God, Hester, you're eighty-odd thousand to the good, and a poor devil of a son to the bad. But, poor devil, poor devil, he's best

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gone out of a life where he rides his rocking-horse to find a winner.'

About the Author

D.H. Lawrence (1895–1930) was born in a mining village near Nottingham in England. His father was a coal miner and his mother a genteel and ambitious lady who had worked previously as a schoolmistress. Their conflicting interests had had a powerful impact on the physical and imaginative build-up of young Lawrence.

Lawrence wrote novels, poems, short stories, criticism and miscellaneous prose. His work, at its best, is marked by intensity of feeling, psychological insight and vivid evocation of events, places and nature.

Understanding the Text

1. What was the reason for young Paul's restlessness at the beginning of the story? How did it find expression?
2. Why do you think Paul's mother was not satisfied with the yearly birthday gift of 1,000 pounds for five years?
3. What was the reason for the anxiety of Paul's mother as he grew older?
4. Paul's final bet made the family rich but cost him his life. Explain.

Talking About the Text

Discuss the following in pairs or in small groups

1. 'Luck is necessary for success in life'.
2. Although Paul's mother liked to be rich she did not approve of betting on horses.
3. What were the voices that Paul heard? Did they lead him to success in the real sense?

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Appreciation

1. Examine the communication channels in the story between
   a. Paul and his mother
   b. Paul and Bassett
   c. Paul and his uncle
   d. Bassett and Paul's uncle
   e. Paul's mother and his uncle.
2. How has the author linked the symbol of the rocking-horse to Paul's triumphs at the races?
3. The ending of the story is an instance of irony. Suppose Paul had not died at the end, how would you have reacted to the story?

Language Work

1. 'A bird in hand is worth two in the bush'.
   a. Explain the above statement in the literal sense.
   b. Explain it in the context in which it is mentioned in the story.
   c. Is there a corresponding proverb in your own language?
2. Explain the following phrases
   - Sure as eggs
   - Spinning yarns
   - Turned to dust

   Use them in sentences of your own.
3. Given below is the dictionary meaning of

   Smirk : to smile in a silly or unpleasant way that shows that you are pleased with yourself.

   Look up the dictionary for the following words which are also related to facial expressions and write down the meaning of each

smile	grin	grimace	sneer

Suggested Reading

1. 'Sun and Moon' by Katherine Mansfield.

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4 The Adventure of the Three Garridebs

Arthur Conan Doyle

☞ *Look for these expressions in the text and guess what they mean from the context*

with a disconsolate air	of sinister and murderous reputation
want of imaginative intuition	penitentiary
devilish ingenuity	confederate in crime
shamefaced grin	dissipated dreams
rigmarole of lies	syncopated dialogue
cadaverous face	

It may have been a comedy, or it may have been a tragedy. It cost one man his reason, it cost me a blood-letting, and it cost yet another man the penalties of the law. Yet there was certainly an element of comedy. Well, you shall judge for yourselves.

I remember the date very well, for, it was in the same month that Holmes refused a knighthood for services which may perhaps some day be described. I only refer to the matter in passing, for, in my position of partner and confidant I am obliged to be particularly careful to avoid any indiscretion. I repeat, however, that this enables me to fix the date, which was the latter end of June 1902, shortly after the conclusion of the South African War. Holmes had spent several days in bed, as was his habit from time to time, but he emerged that morning with a long foolscap document in his hand and a twinkle of amusement in his austere grey eyes.

'There is a chance for you to make some money, friend Watson,' said he. 'Have you ever heard the name of Garrideb?'

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I admitted that I had not.

'Well, if you can lay your hand upon a Garrideb, there's money in it.'

'Why?'

'Ah, that's a long story—rather a whimsical one, too. I don't think in all our explorations of human complexities we have ever come upon anything more singular. The fellow will be here presently for cross-examination, so I won't open the matter up till he comes. But meanwhile, that's the name we want.'

The telephone directory lay on the table beside me and I turned over the pages in a rather hopeless quest. But to my amazement there was this strange name in its due place. I gave a cry of triumph.

Here you are Holmes! Here it is!'

Holmes took the book from my hand.

'Garrideb, N.' he read, '136, Little Ryder Street, W. Sorry to disappoint you, my dear Watson, but this is the man himself. That is the address upon his letter. We want another to match him.'

Mrs Hudson had come in with a card upon a tray. I took it up and glanced at it.

'Why, here it is!' I cried in amazement. 'This is a different initial. John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law, Moorville, Kansas, U.S.A.'

Holmes smiled as he looked at the card. 'I am afraid you must make yet another effort, Watson,' said he. 'This gentleman is also in the plot already, though I certainly did not expect to see him this morning. However, he is in a position to tell us a good deal which I want to know.'

A moment later he was in the room. Mr John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law, was a short, powerful man with the round, fresh clean-shaven face characteristic of so many American men of affairs. The general effect was chubby and rather childlike, so that one received the impression of quite a young man with a broad set smile upon his face. His eyes, however, were arresting. Seldom in any human head have I seen a pair which bespoke a more intense inward life, so bright were they, so alert, so responsive to every change of thought. His accent was American but was not accompanied by any eccentricity of speech.

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'Mr Holmes?' he asked, glancing from one to the other. 'Ah, yes! Your pictures are not unlike you, sir, if I may say so I believe you have had a letter from my namesake, Mr Nathan Garrideb, have you not?'

'Pray sit down,' said Sherlock Holmes. We shall, I fancy, have a good deal to discuss.' He took up his sheets of foolscap.

You are, of course, the Mr John Garrideb mentioned in this document. But surely you have been in England some time?'

'Why do you say that, Mr Holmes?' I seemed to read sudden suspicion in those expressive eyes.

'Your whole outfit is English.'

Mr Garrideb forced a laugh. 'I've read of your tricks, Mr Holmes, but I never thought I would be the subject of them. Where do you read that?'

'The shoulder cut of your coat, the toes of your boots—could anyone doubt it?'

'Well, well, I had no idea I was so obvious a Britisher. But business brought me over here some time ago and so, as you say, my outfit is nearly all London. However, I guess your time is of value and we did not meet to talk about the cut of my socks. What about getting down to that paper you hold in your hand?'

Holmes had, in some way, ruffled our visitor, whose chubby face had assumed a far less amiable expression.

'Patience! Patience, Mr Garrideb!' said my friend in a soothing voice. 'Dr Watson would tell you that these little digressions of mine sometimes prove in the end to have some bearing on the matter. But why did Mr Nathan Garrideb not come with you?'

'Why did he ever drag you into it at all?' asked our visitor, with a sudden outflame of anger. 'What in thunder had you to do with it? Here was a bit of professional business between two gentlemen, and one of them must need call in a detective! I saw him this morning and he told me this fool-trick he had played on me, and that's why I am here. But I feel bad about it, all the same.'

'There was no reflection upon you, Mr Garrideb. It was simply zeal upon his part to gain your end—an end which is, I understand, equally vital for both of you. He knew that

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I had means of getting information and, therefore, it was very natural that he should apply to me.'

Our visitor's angry face gradually cleared.

'Well, that puts it different,' said he, 'When I went to see him this morning and he told me he had sent for a detective, I just asked for your address and came right away. I don't want police butting into a private matter. But if you are content just to help us find the man, there can be no harm in that.'

'Well, that is just how it stands,' said Holmes. 'And now, sir, since you are here, we had best have a clear account from your own lips. My friend here knows nothing of the details.'

Mr Garrideb surveyed me with not too friendly a gaze.

'Need he know?' he asked.

'We usually work together.'

'Well, there's no reason it should be kept a secret. I'll give you the facts as short as I can make them. If you came from Kansas I would not need to explain to you who Alexander Hamilton Garrideb was. He made his money in real estate and, afterwards, in the wheat pit at Chicago, but he spent it in buying up as much land as would make one of your counties, lying along the Arkansas River, west of Fort Dodge. It's grazing land and lumber land and Arabic land and mineralised land, and just every sort of land that brings dollars to the man that owns it.

'He had no kith nor kin—or, if he had, I never heard of it. But he took a kind of pride in the queerness of his name. That was what brought us together. I was in the law at Topeka, and one day I had a visit from the old man and he was tickled to death to meet another man with his own name. It was his pet fad and he was dead set to find out if there were any more Garridebs in the world. 'Find me another!' said he. I told him I was a busy man and could not spend my life hiking round the world in search of Garridebs. 'None the less,' said he, 'that is just what you will do if things pan out as I planned them.' I thought he was joking, but there was a powerful lot of meaning in the words, as I was soon to discover.

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'For he died within a year of saying them and he left a will behind him. It was the queerest will that has ever been filed in the State of Kansas. His property was divided into three parts and I was to have one on condition that I found two Garridebs who would share the remainder. It's five million dollars for each if it is a cent, but we can't lay a finger on it until we all three stand in a row.

'It was so big a chance that I just let my legal practice slide and I set forth looking for Garridebs. There is not one in the United States. I went through it, sir, with a fine-toothed comb and never a Garrideb could I catch. Then I tried the old country. Sure enough there was the name in the London Telephone Directory. I went after him two days ago and explained the whole matter to him. But he is a lone man, like myself, with some women relations, but no men. It says three adult men in the will. So you see we still have a vacancy and if you can help to fill it we will be very ready to pay your charges.'

'Well, Watson,' said Holmes, with a smile, 'I said it was rather whimsical, did I not? I should have thought, sir, that your obvious way was to advertise in the agony columns of the papers.'

'I have done that, Mr Holmes. No replies.'

'Dear me! Well, it is certainly a most curious little problem. I may take a glance at it in my leisure. By the way, it is curious that you should have come from Topeka. I used to have a correspondent—he is dead now—old Dr Lysander Starr, who was Mayor in 1890.'

'Good old Dr Starr!' said our visitor. 'His name is still honoured. Well, Mr Holmes, I suppose all we can do is to report to you and let you know how we progress. I reckon you will hear within a day or two.' With this assurance our American bowed and departed.

Holmes had lit his pipe, and he sat for some time with a curious smile upon his face.

'Well?' I asked at last.

'I am wondering, Watson—just wondering!'

'At what?'

Holmes took his pipe from his lips.

'I was wondering, Watson, what on earth could be the

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object of this man in telling us such a rigmarole of lies. I nearly asked him so—for there are times when a brutal frontal attack is the best policy—but I judged it better to let him think he had fooled us. Here is a man with an English coat frayed at the elbow and trousers bagged at the knee with a year's wear, and yet by this document and by his own account he is a provincial American lately landed in London. There have been no advertisements in the agony columns. You know that I miss nothing there. They are my favourite covert for putting up a bird and I would never have overlooked such a cock pheasant as that. I never knew a Dr Lysander Starr of Topeka. Touch him where you would he was false. I think the fellow is really an American, but he has worn his accent smooth with years of London. What is his game, then, and what motive lies behind this preposterous search for Garridebs? It's worth our attention, for, granting that the man is a rascal, he is certainly a complex and ingenious one. We must now find out if our other correspondent is a fraud also. Just ring him up, Watson.'

I did so, and heard a thin, quavering voice at the other end of the line.

'Yes, yes, I am Mr Nathan Garrideb. Is Mr Holmes there? I should very much like to have a word with Mr Holmes.'

My friend took the instrument and I heard the usual syncopated dialogue.

'Yes, he has been here. I understand that you don't know him... How long? Only two days!... Yes, yes, of course it is a most captivating prospect. Will you be at home this evening? I suppose your namesake will not be there?... Very good, we will come then, for I would rather have a chat without him... Dr Watson will come with me... I understood from your note that you did not go out often... Well, we shall be round about six. You need not mention it to the American lawyer... Very good. Good-bye!'

It was twilight of a lovely spring evening and even Little Ryder Street, one of the smaller offshoots from the Edgware Road, within a stone-cast of old Tyburn Tree of evil memory, looked golden and wonderful in the slanting rays of the setting sun. The particular house to which we were directed

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was a large, old-fashioned, Early Georgian edifice with a fat brick face broken only by two deep bay windows on the ground floor. It was on this ground floor that our client lived and, indeed, the low windows proved to be the front of the huge room in which he spent his waking hours. Holmes pointed as we passed to the small brass plate which bore the curious name.

'Up some years, Watson,' he remarked, indicating its discoloured surface. 'It's his real name, anyhow, and that is something to note.'

The house had a common stair and there were a number of names painted in the hall, some indicating offices and some private chambers. It was not a collection of residential flats, but rather the abode of Bohemian bachelors. Our client opened the door for us himself and apologised by saying that the woman in charge left at four o'clock. Mr Nathan Garrideb proved to be a very tall, loose jointed, round-backed person, gaunt and bald, some sixty-odd years of age. He had a cadaverous face, with the dull dead skin of a man to whom exercise was unknown. Large round spectacles and a small projecting goat's beard combined with his stooping attitude to give him an expression of peering curiosity. The general effect, however, was amiable, though eccentric.

The room was as curious as its occupant. It looked like a small museum. It was both broad and deep, with cupboards and cabinets all round, crowded with specimens, geological and anatomical. Cases of butterflies and moths flanked each side of the entrance. A large table in the centre was littered with all sorts of debris, while the tall brass tube of a powerful microscope bristled up amongst them. As I glanced round I was surprised at the universality of the man's interests. Here was a case of ancient coins. There was a cabinet of flint instruments. Behind his central table was a large cupboard of fossil bones. Above was a line of plaster skulls with such names as 'Neanderthal', 'Heidelberg,' 'Cromagnan' printed beneath them. It was clear that he was a student of many subjects. As he stood in front of us now, he held a piece of chamois leather in his right hand with which he was polishing a coin.

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'Syracusan—of the best period,' he explained, holding it up. 'They degenerated greatly towards the end. At their best I hold them supreme, though some prefer the Alexandrian school. You will find a chair here, Mr Holmes. Pray allow me to clear these bones. And you, sir—ah, yes, Dr Watson—if you would have the goodness to put the Japanese vase to one side. You see round me my little interests in life. My doctor lectures me about never going out, but why should I go out when I have so much to hold me here? I can assure you that the adequate cataloguing of one of those cabinets would take me three good months.'

Holmes looked round him with curiosity.

'But do you tell me that you never go out?' he said.

'Now and again I drive down to Sotheby's or Christie's. Otherwise I very seldom leave my room. I am not too strong and my researches are very absorbing. But you can imagine, Mr Holmes, what a terrific shock—pleasant but terrific—it was for me when I heard of this unparalleled good fortune. It only needs one more Garrideb to complete the matter and surely we can find one; I had a brother, but he is dead, and female relatives are disqualified. But there must surely be others in the world. I had heard that you handled strange cases, and that was why I sent for you. Of course, this American gentleman is quite right, and I should have taken his advice first, but I acted for the best.'

'I think you acted very wisely indeed,' said Holmes. 'But are you really anxious to acquire an estate in America?'

'Certainly not, sir. Nothing would induce me to leave my collection. But this gentleman has assured me that he will buy me out as soon as we have established our claim. Five million dollars was the sum named. There are a dozen specimens in the market at the present moment which fill gaps in my collection, and which I am unable to purchase for want of a few hundred pounds. Just think what I could do with five million dollars. Why, I have the nucleus of a national collection. I shall be the Hans Sloane of my age.'

His eyes gleamed behind his great spectacles. It was very clear that no pains would be spared by Mr Nathan Garrideb in finding a namesake.

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'I merely called to make your acquaintance and there is no reason why I should interrupt your studies,' said Holmes. 'I prefer to establish personal touch with those with whom I do business. There are few questions I need ask, for I have your very clear narrative in my pocket and I filled up the blanks when this American gentleman called. I understand that up to this week you were unaware of his existence.'

'That is so. He called last Tuesday.'

'Did he tell you of our interview today?'

'Yes, he came straight back to me. He had been very angry.'

'Why should he be angry?'

'He seemed to think it was some reflection on his honour. But he was quite cheerful again when he returned.'

'Did he suggest any course of action?'

'No, sir, he did not.'

'Has he had, or asked for, any money from you?'

'No, sir, never!'

'You see no possible object he has in view?'

'None, except what he states.'

'Did you tell him of our telephone appointment?'

'Yes, sir, I did.'

Holmes was lost in thought. I could see that he was puzzled.

'Have you any articles of great value in your collection?'

'No, sir. I am not a rich man. It is a good collection, but not a very valuable one.'

'You have no fear of burglars?'

'Not the least.'

'How long have you been in these rooms?'

'Nearly five years.'

Holmes's cross-examination was interrupted by an imperative knocking at the door. No sooner had our client unlatched it than the American lawyer burst excitedly into the room.

'Here you are!' he cried, waving a paper over his head. 'I thought I should be in time to get you. Mr Nathan Garrideb, my congratulations! You are a rich man, sir. Our business is happily finished and all is well. As to you, Mr Holmes,

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we can only say we are sorry if we have given you any useless trouble.'

He handed over the paper to our client, who stood staring at a marked advertisement. Holmes and I leaned forward and read it over his shoulder. This is how it ran—

HOWARD GARRIDEB

Constructor of Agricultural Machinery. Binders, reapers' steam and hand plows, drills, harrows, farmers' carts, buck-boards, and all other appliances. Estimates for Artesian Wells. Apply Grosvenor Buildings, Aston.

'Glorious!' gasped our host. 'That makes our third man.'

'I had opened up inquiries in Birmingham,' said the American, 'and my agent there has sent me this advertisement from a local paper. We must hustle and put the thing through. I have written to this man and told him that you will see him in his office tomorrow afternoon at four o'clock.'

'You want me to see him?'

'What do you say, Mr Holmes? Don't you think it would be wiser? Here am I, a wandering American with a wonderful tale. Why should he believe what I tell him? But you are a Britisher with solid references and he is bound to take notice of what you say. I would go with you if you wished, but I have a very busy day tomorrow and I could always follow you if you are in any trouble.'

'Well, I have not made such a journey for years.'

'It is nothing, Mr Garrideb. I have figured out your connections. You leave at twelve and should be there soon after two. Then you can be back the same night. All you have to do is to see this man, explain the matter and get an affidavit of his existence. By the Lord!' he added, hotly, 'considering I've come all the way from the centre of America, it is surely little enough if you go a hundred miles in order to put this matter through.'

'Quite so,' said Holmes. 'I think what this gentleman says is very true.'

Mr Nathan Garrideb shrugged his shoulders with a disconsolate air. 'Well, If you insist I shall go,' said he. 'It is

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certainly hard for me to refuse you anything, considering the glory of hope that you have brought into my life.'

'Then that is agreed,' said Holmes, 'and no doubt you will let me have a report as soon as you can.'

'I'll see to that,' said the American. 'Well,' he added, looking at his watch, 'I'll have to get on. I'll call tomorrow, Mr Nathan, and see you off to Birmingham. Coming my way, Mr Holmes? Well, then, good-bye and we may have good news for you tomorrow night.'

I noticed that my friend's face cleared when the American left the room and the look of thoughtful perplexity had vanished.

'I wish I could look over your collection, Mr Garrideb,' said he. 'In my profession all sorts of odd knowledge comes useful and this room of yours is a storehouse of it.'

Our client shone with pleasure and his eyes gleamed from behind his big glasses.

'I had always heard, sir, that you were a very intelligent man,' said he. 'I could take you round now, if you have the time.'

'Unfortunately, I have not. But these specimens are so well labelled and classified that they hardly need your personal explanation. If I should be able to look in tomorrow, I presume that there would be no objection to my glancing over them?'

'None at all. You are most welcome. The place will, of course, be shut up, but Mrs Saunders is in the basement up to four o'clock and would let you in with her key.'

'Well, I happen to be clear tomorrow afternoon. If you would say a word to Mrs Saunders it would be quite in order. By the way, who is your house-agent?'

Our client was amazed at the sudden question.

'Holloway and Steele, in the Edgware Road. But why?'

'I am a bit of an archaeologist myself when it comes to houses,' said Holmes, laughing. 'I was wondering if this was Queen Anne or Georgian.'

'Georgian, beyond doubt.'

'Really. I should have thought a little earlier. However, it is easily ascertained. Well, good-bye, Mr Garrideb and may you have every success in your Birmingham journey.'

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The house-agent's was close by, but we found that it was closed for the day, so we made our way back to Baker Street. It was not till after dinner that Holmes reverted to the subject.

'Our little problem draws to a close,' said he. 'No doubt you have outlined the solution in your own mind.'

'I can make neither head nor tail of it.'

'The head is surely clear enough and the tail we should see tomorrow. Did you notice nothing curious about that advertisement?'

'I saw that the word 'plough' was misspelt.'

'Oh, you did notice that, did you? Come, Watson, you improve all the time. Yes, it was bad English but good American. The printer had set it up as received. Then the buckboards. That is American also. And artesian wells are commoner with them than with us. It was a typical American advertisement, but purporting to be from an English firm. What do you make of that?'

'I can only suppose that this American lawyer put it in himself. What his object was I fail to understand.'

'Well, there are alternative explanations. Anyhow, he wanted to get this good old fossil up to Birmingham. That is very clear. I might have told him that he was clearly going on a wild-goose chase, but, on second thoughts, it seemed better to clear the stage by letting him go. Tomorrow, Watson—well, tomorrow will speak for itself.'

Holmes was up and out early. When he returned at lunch-time I noticed that his face was very grave.

'This is a more serious matter than I had expected, Watson,' said he. 'It is fair to tell you so, though I know it will only be an additional reason to you for running your head into danger. I should know my Watson by now. But there is danger, and you should know it.'

'Well, it is not the first we have shared, Holmes. I hope it may not be the last. What is the particular danger this time?'

'We are up against a very hard case. I have identified Mr John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law. He is none other than 'Killer' Evans, of sinister and murderous reputation.'

'I fear I am none the wiser.'

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'Ah, it is not part of your profession to carry about a portable Newgate Calendar in your memory. I have been down to see friend Lestrade at the Yard. There may be an occasional want of imaginative intuition down there, but they lead the world for thoroughness and method. I had an idea that we might get on the track of our American friend in their records. Sure enough, I found his chubby face smiling up at me from the Rogues' Portrait Gallery. James Winter, alias Morecroft, alias Killer Evans, was the inscription below.' Holmes drew an envelope from his pocket. 'I scribbled down a few points from his dossier. Aged forty four. Native of Chicago. Known to have shot three men in the States. Escaped from penitentiary through political influence. Came to London in 1893. Shot a man over cards in a night club in the Waterloo Road in January, 1895. Man died, but he was shown to have been the aggressor in the row. Dead man was identified as Rodger Presbury, famous as forger and coiner in Chicago. Killer Evans released in 1901. Has been under police supervision since, but so far as known has led an honest life. Very dangerous man, usually carries arms and is prepared to use them. That is our bird, Watson—a sporting bird, as you must admit.'

'But what is his game?'

'Well, it begins to define itself. I have been to the house-agents. Our client, as he told us, has been there five years. It was unlet for a year before then. The previous tenant was a gentleman at large named Waldron. Waldron's appearance was well remembered at the office. He had suddenly vanished and nothing more been heard of him. He was a tall, bearded man with very dark features. Now, Presbury, the man whom Killer Evans had shot, was, according to Scotland Yard, a tall, dark man with a beard. As a working hypothesis, I think we may take it that Presbury, the American criminal, used to live in the very room which our innocent friend now devotes to his museum. So at last we get a link, you see.'

'And the next link?'

'Well, we must go now and look for that.'

He took a revolver from the drawer and handed it to me.

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'I have my old favourite with me. If our Wild West friend tries to live up to his nickname, we must be ready for him. I'll give you an hour for a siesta, Watson, and then I think it will be time for our Ryder Street adventure.'

It was just four o'clock when we reached the curious apartment of Nathan Garrideb. Mrs Saunders, the caretaker, was about to leave but she had no hesitation in admitting us, for the door shut with a spring lock and Holmes promised to see that all was safe before we left. Shortly afterwards the outer door closed, her bonnet passed the bow window and we knew that we were alone in the lower floor of the house. Holmes made a rapid examination of the premises. There was one cupboard in a dark corner which stood out a little from the wall. It was behind this that we eventually crouched, while Holmes in a whisper outlined his intentions.

'He wanted to get our amiable friend out of his room—that is very clear and, as the collector never went out, it took some planning to do it. The whole of this Garrideb invention was apparently for no other end. I must say, Watson, that there is a certain devilish ingenuity about it, even if the queer name of the tenant did give him an opening which he could hardly have expected. He wove his plot with remarkable cunning.'

'But what did he want?'

'Well, that is what we are here to find out. It has nothing whatever to do with our client, so far as I can read the situation. It is something connected with the man he murdered—the man who may have been his confederate in crime. There is some guilty secret in the room. That is how I read it. At first I thought our friend might have something in his collection more valuable than he knew—something worth the attention of a big criminal. But the fact that Rodger Presbury of evil memory inhabited these rooms points to some deeper reason. Well, Watson, we can but possess our souls in patience and see what the hour may bring.'

That hour was not long in striking. We crouched closer in the shadow as we heard the outer door open and shut. Then came the sharp, metallic snap of a key and the American was in the room. He closed the door softly behind

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him, took a sharp glance around him to see that all was safe, threw off his overcoat and walked up to the central table with the brisk manner of one who knows exactly what he has to do and how to do it. He pushed the table to one side, tore up the square of carpet on which it rested, rolled it completely back and then, drawing a jimmy from his inside pocket, he knelt down and worked vigorously upon the floor. Presently we heard the sound of sliding boards and, an instant later, a square had opened in the planks. Killer Evans struck a match, lit a stump of candle, and vanished from our view.

Clearly our moment had come. Holmes touched my wrist as a signal and together we stole across to the open trapdoor. Gently as we moved, however, the old floor must have creaked under our feet, for the head of our American, peering anxiously round, emerged suddenly from the open space. His face turned upon us with a glare of baffled rage, which gradually softened into a rather shamefaced grin as he realised that two pistols were pointed at his head.

'Well, well!' said he, coolly as he scrambled to the surface. 'I guess you have been one too many for me, Mr Holmes. Saw through my game, I suppose and played me for a sucker from the first. Well, sir, I hand it to you; you have me beat and—'

In an instant he had whisked out a revolver from his breast pocket and had fired two shots. I felt a sudden hot sear as if a red-hot iron had been pressed to my thigh. There was a crash as Holmes's pistol came down on the man's head. I had a vision of him sprawling upon the floor with blood running down his face while Holmes rummaged him for weapons. Then my friend's wiry arms were round me and he was leading me to a chair.

'You're not hurt, Watson? For God's sake, say that you are not hurt!'

It was worth a wound—it was worth many wounds—to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask. The clear, hard eyes were dimmed for a moment and the firm lips were shaking. For the one and only time I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as of a great

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brain. All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation.

'It's nothing, Holmes. It's a mere scratch.'

He had ripped up my trousers with his pocket-knife.

'You are right,' he cried, with an immense sigh of relief. 'It is quite superficial.' His face set like flint as he glared at our prisoner who was sitting up with a dazed face. 'By the Lord, it is as well for you. If you had killed Watson, you would not have got out of this room alive. Now, sir, what have you to say for yourself?'

He had nothing to say for himself. He only lay and scowled. I leaned on Holmes's arm and together we looked down into the small cellar which had been disclosed by the secret flap. It was still illuminated by the candle which Evans had taken down with him. Our eyes fell upon a mass of rusted machinery, great rolls of paper, a litter of bottles and, neatly arranged upon a small table, a number of neat little bundles.

'A printing press—a counterfeiter's outfit,' said Holmes.

'Yes, sir,' said our prisoner, staggering slowly to his feet and then sinking into the chair. 'The greatest counterfeiter London ever saw. That's Presbury's machine and those bundles on the table are two thousand of Presbury's notes worth a hundred each and fit to pass anywhere. Help yourselves, gentlemen. Call it a deal and let me beat it.'

Holmes laughed.

'We don't do things like that, Mr Evans. There is no bolt-hole for you in this country. You shot this man, Presbury, did you not?'

'Yes, sir, and got five years for it, though it was he who pulled on me. Five years—when I should have had a medal the size of a soup plate. No living man could tell a Presbury from a Bank of England, and if I hadn't put him out he would have flooded London with them. I was the only one in the world who knew where he made them. Can you wonder that I wanted to get to the place? And can you wonder that when I found this crazy boob of a bughunter with the queer name squatting right on the top of it, and never quitting his room, I had to do the best I could to shift him? Maybe I

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would have been wiser if I had put him away. It would have been easy enough, but I'm a soft-hearted guy that can't begin shooting unless the other man has a gun also. But say, Mr Holmes, what have I done wrong, anyhow? I've not used this plant. I've not hurt this old stiff. Where do you get me?'

'Only attempted murder, so far as I can see,' said Holmes. 'But that's not our job. They take that at the next stage. What we wanted at present was just your sweet self. Please give the Yard a call, Watson. It won't be entirely unexpected.'

So those were the facts about Killer Evans and his remarkable invention of the three Garridebs. We heard later that our poor old friend never got over the shock of his dissipated dreams. When his castle in the air fell down, it buried him beneath the ruins. He was last heard of at a nursing home in Brixton. It was a glad day at the Yard when the Presbury outfit was discovered for, though they knew that it existed, they had never been able, after the death of the man, to find out where it was. Evans had indeed done great service and caused several worthy CID men to sleep the sounder, for the counterfeiter stands in a class by himself as a public danger. They would willingly have subscribed to that soup-plate medal of which the criminal had spoken, but an unappreciative Bench took a less favourite view and the Killer returned to those shades from which he had just emerged.

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About the Author

Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930), who was a medical practitioner, is well known for his detective stories. His creations—the detective Sherlock Holmes and the chronicler, Dr Watson—are well known the world over. The collections of his short stories include *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and *The Return of Sherlock Holmes.* The stories are full of suspense, excitement and humour. At the same time, they develop a structure of keen, analytical intelligence, with a deep human appeal.

Understanding the Text

1. What clues did Sherlock Holmes work upon to get at the fact that the story of the three Garridebs was a ruse?
2. What was John Garrideb's objective in inventing the story of Alexander Hamilton Garrideb and his legacy?
3. Why didn't John Garrideb like the idea of including Holmes in the hunt for the third Garrideb?
4. Who was Roger Presbury and how was John Garrideb connected with him?
5. How did Holmes guess that John Garrideb would go to 136, Little Ryder Street? Did he expect to find what he ultimately did before he went there?

Talking About the Text

Discuss the following in pairs or in small groups

1. 'It was worth a wound—it was worth many wounds—to know the depth of loyalty and love that lay behind that cold mask'—how does this comment throw light on the kind of relationship between Holmes and Watson?
2. The cleverest of criminals leave behind clues to their crime.
3. How did Holmes' digressions sometimes prove in the end to have a bearing on the matter on hand? Discuss this with reference to all the apparently irrelevant points he was trying to gather information from.

Appreciation

1. Examine the structure of the short story 'Adventure of the Three Garridebs' with the help of this framework
   - The narrator of the story
   - Introduction of the topic of the story
   - Introduction of the main characters in the plot
   - Development of the plot
   - Climax
   - Resolution of the mystery.
2. Examine the subtle humour in the narration of the story that lightens the gravity of the subject matter.

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Language Work

1. *a.* Identify the words in the advertisement that gave away the fact that it was placed by John Garrideb.
   b. Make a list of words which are spelt differently in American and British English.
2. Look at the highlighted expressions in the following sentences from the text and explain their figurative meaning
   - 'I went through it, sir, **with a fine-toothed comb** and never a Garrideb could I catch.'
   - 'They are my favourite covert for **putting up a bird,** and I would never have overlooked **a cock pheasant** as that.'
   - 'There is no **bolt-hole** for you in this country.'
   - 'When **his castle in the air** fell down, it buried him beneath the ruins.'

Suggested Reading

1. *The Case-book of Sherlock Holmes* by Arthur Conan Doyle
2. *The Valley of Fear* by Arthur Conan Doyle
3. *Tales of Adventure and Medical Life* by Arthur Conan Doyle.

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5 Pappachi's Moth

Arundhati Roy

☛ *Guess the meaning of the following expressions from the context*

ignominy of retirement	conical corneas
slouch around	weaving
sullen circles	entomologist
taxonomic reshuffle	lepidopterists
pernicious ghost	

Mammachi had started making pickles commercially soon after Pappachi retired from government service in Delhi and came to live in Ayemenem. The Kottayam Bible Society was having a fair and asked Mammachi to make some of her famous banana jam and tender mango pickle. It sold quickly, and Mammachi found that she had more orders than she could cope with. Thrilled with her success, she decided to persist with the pickles and jam, and soon found herself busy all year round. Pappachi, for his part, was having trouble coping with the ignominy of retirement. He was seventeen years older than Mammachi and realised with a shock that he was an old man when his wife was still in her prime.

Though Mammachi had conical corneas and was already practically blind, Pappachi would not help her with the pickle-making, because he did not consider pickle-making a suitable job for a high-ranking ex-government official. He had always been a jealous man so he greatly resented the attention his wife was suddenly getting. He slouched around the compound in his immaculately tailored suits, weaving sullen circles around mounds of red chillies and freshly powdered yellow turmeric, watching Mammachi supervise the buying, the weighing, the salting and drying,

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of limes and tender mangoes. Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings weren't new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place. One night Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi's violin and threw it in the river.

Then Chacko came home for a summer vacation from Oxford. He had grown to be a big man and was, in those days, strong from rowing for Balliol. A week after he arrived he found Pappachi beating Mammachi in the study. Chacko strode into the room, caught Pappachi's vase-hand and twisted it around his back.

'I never want this to happen again,' he told his father, 'Ever.'

For the rest of that day Pappachi sat in the verandah and stared stonily out at the ornamental garden, ignoring the plates of food that Kochu Maria brought him. Late at night he went into his study and brought out his favourite mahogany rocking chair. He put it down in the middle of the driveway and smashed it into little bits with a plumber's monkey wrench. He left it there in the moonlight, a heap of varnished wicker and splintered wood. He never touched Mammachi again. But he never spoke to her either as long as he lived. When he needed anything he used Kochu Maria or Baby Kochamma as intermediaries.

In the evenings, when he knew visitors were expected, he would sit on the verandah and sew buttons that weren't missing onto his shirts, to create the impression that Mammachi neglected him. To some small degree he did succeed in further corroding Ayemenem's view of working wives.

He bought the skyblue Plymouth from an old Englishman in Munnar. He became a familiar sight in Ayemenem, coasting importantly down the narrow road in his wide car, looking outwardly elegant but sweating freely inside his woollen suits. He wouldn't allow Mammachi or anyone else in the family to use it, or even to sit in it. The Plymouth was Pappachi's revenge.

Pappachi had been an Imperial Entomologist at the Pusa Institute. After Independence, when the British left, his designation was changed from Imperial Entomologist

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to Joint Director, Entomology. The year he retired, he had risen to a rank equivalent to Director.

His life's greatest setback was not having had the moth that he had discovered named after him.

It fell into his drink one evening while he was sitting in the verandah of a rest house after a long day in the field. As he picked it out he noticed its unusually dense dorsal tufts. He took a closer look. With growing excitement he mounted it, measured it and the next morning placed it in the sun for a few hours for the alcohol to evaporate. Then he caught the first train back to Delhi. To taxonomic attention and, he hoped, fame. After six unbearable months of anxiety, to Pappachi's intense disappointment, he was told that his moth had finally been identified as a slightly unusual race of a well-known species that belonged to the tropical family, Lymantriidae.

The real blow came twelve years later, when, as a consequence of a radical taxonomic reshuffle, lepidopterists decided that Pappachi's moth was in fact a separate species and genus hitherto unknown to science. By then, of course, Pappachi had retired and moved to Ayemenem. It was too late for him to assert his claim to the discovery. His moth was named after the Acting Director of the Department of Entomology, a junior officer whom Pappachi had always disliked.

In the years to come, even though he had been ill-humoured long before he discovered the moth, Pappachi's Moth was held responsible for his black moods and sudden bouts of temper. Its pernicious ghost—grey, furry and with unusually dense dorsal tufts—haunted every house that he ever lived in. It tormented him and his children and his children's children.

Until the day he died, even in the stifling Ayemenem heat, every single day, Pappachi wore a well-pressed three-piece suit and his gold pocket watch. On his dressing table, next to his cologne and silver hair brush, he kept a picture of himself as a young man, with his hair slicked down, taken in a photographer's studio in Vienna where he had done the six-month diploma course that had qualified him to apply for the post of Imperial Entomologist. It was during

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those few months they spent in Vienna that Mammachi took her first lessons on the violin. The lessons were abruptly discontinued when Mammachi's teacher, Launsky-Tieffenthal, made the mistake of telling Pappachi that his wife was exceptionally talented and, in his opinion, potentially concert class.

Mammachi pasted, in the family photograph album, the clipping from the *Indian Express* that reported Pappachi's death. It said:

> Noted entomologist, Shri Benaan John Ipe, son of late Rev.E. John Ipe of Ayemenem (popularly known as Punnyan Kunju), suffered a massive heart attack and passed away at the Kottayam General Hospital last night. He developed chest pains around 1.05 a.m. and was rushed to hospital. The end came at 2.45 a.m. Shri Ipe had been keeping indifferent health since last six months. He is survived by his wife Soshamma and two children.

At Pappachi's funeral, Mammachi cried and her contact lenses slid around in her eyes. Ammu told the twins that Mammachi was crying more because she was used to him than because she loved him. She was used to having him slouching around the pickle factory, and was used to being beaten from time to time. Ammu said that human beings were creatures of habit, and it was amazing the kind of things they could get used to. You only had to look around you, Ammu said, to see that beatings with brass vases were the least of them.

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About the Author

Arundhati Roy, (born 1961) an architect by training, is a novelist and screen writer. Her first novel, *The God of Small Things,* from which this extract has been selected, is the winner of the 1997 Booker Prize, a prestigious literary award. She now lives in New Delhi and is an activist.

Understanding the Text

1. Comment on the relationship shared by Mammachi and Pappachi.
2. How does Mammachi stand out as an independent and resilient woman in the text?
3. Why does John Ipe consider retirement to be a dishonour?
4. What was the underlying reason for John Ipe's disgust with the world?

Talking About the Text

Discuss in pairs

1. Chacko's firmness in dealing with the irrational behaviour of his father.
2. The contrast between the outward elegance of a person and his private behaviour.
3. Approval from the outside world and approval within the family.

Appreciation

1. How does the author succeed in raising crucial social issues not through open criticism but through subtle suggestion?
2. Within a few pages the author has packed the important events in the lives of John Ipe and his wife. Discuss how conciseness and economy of expression can achieve effective portrayal of entire lives.
3. Identify instances of ironical comment in the story.

Language Work

1. **Entomologist** and **lepidopterist** are mentioned in the text and you must have guessed the meanings of these words or found them out from the dictionary.

   Now match the kinds of scientists given below with the work they do:

A	B
ornithologist	study of the skin
gerontologist	study of cells

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ergonomist	study of birds
dermatologist	study of old age
cytologist	study of design of equipment

2. A short report announcing the death of a person in a newspaper is called an 'obituary'. Where would you find the following

a citation	an epitaph	a glossary
an abstract	a postscript	

☞ *Necessity is said to be the mother of invention. Read this piece below on the invention of the Braille system to help the visually impaired.*

READING FOR THE BLIND

Until 1819, learning material for the blind was provided by using letters of the alphabet made of wood, lead, twigs or, sometimes, pins arranged in large pincushions. The Royal Institute for Young Blind Persons in Paris used three-inch deep letters made from cloth.

In 1918, a ten year old blind boy named Louis Braille enrolled at the Institute. It was around this time that Captain Barbier de la Serre devised an alphabet of raised dots and dashes embossed on strips of cardboard. He called it 'night writing' because soldiers could use it to 'read' with their fingertips when in action at night.

His system, however, was not a success because it was too complicated: it used an arrangement of twelve dots to each letter. Braille, now a teenager, became interested in this system. He simplified it and developed the present internationally used Braille system.

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6 The Third and Final Continent

Jhumpa Lahiri

☛ *Guess what these words and phrases mean from the context*

LSE	Grundig reel-to-reel	hollered
heralded	clamorous	stucco
forsythia bushes	ruffles	chapped
foyer	mortified	

I left India in 1964 with a certificate in commerce and the equivalent, in those days, of ten dollars to my name. For three weeks I sailed on the *SS Roma*, an Italian cargo vessel, in a third-class cabin next to the ship's engine, across the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean and, finally, to England. I lived in north London, in Finsbury Park, in a house occupied entirely by penniless Bengali bachelors like myself, at least a dozen and sometimes more, all struggling to educate and establish ourselves abroad.

I attended lectures at the LSE and worked at the university library to get by. We lived three or four to a room, shared a single, icy toilet, and took turns cooking pots of egg curry, which we ate with our hands on a table covered with newspapers. Apart from our jobs we had few responsibilities. On weekends we lounged barefoot in drawstring pyjamas, drinking tea and smoking Rothmans, or set out to watch cricket at Lord's. Some weekends the house was crammed with still more Bengalis to whom we had introduced ourselves at the greengrocer or on the Tube, and we made yet more egg curry, and played Mukesh on a Grundig reel-to-reel, and soaked our dirty dishes in the bathtub. Every now and then someone in the house moved out to live with a woman whom his family back in Calcutta had determined he was to wed. In 1969, when I was thirty-

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six years old, my own marriage was arranged. Around the same time, I was offered a full-time job in America, in the processing department of a library at MIT. The salary was generous enough to support a wife, and I was honoured to be hired by a world-famous university, and so I obtained a sixth-preference green card and prepared to travel farther still.

By now I had enough money to go by plane. I flew first to Calcutta, to attend my wedding, and a week later I flew first to Boston, to begin my new job. During the flight I read *The Student Guide to North America,* a paperback volume that I'd bought before leaving London, for seven shillings six pence on Tottenham Court Road for, although I was no longer a student, I was on a budget all the same. I learned that Americans drove on the right side of the road, not the left, and that they called a lift an elevator and an engaged phone busy. 'The pace of life in North America is different from Britain as you will soon discover,' the guidebook informed me. 'Everybody feels he must get to the top. Don't expect an English cup of tea.' As the plane began its descent over Boston Harbour, the pilot announced the weather and time, and that President Nixon had declared a national holiday: two American men had landed on the moon. Several passengers cheered. 'God bless America!' one of them hollered. Across the aisle, I saw a woman praying.

I spent my first night at the YMCA in Central Square, Cambridge, an inexpensive accommodation recommended by my guidebook. It was walking distance from MIT, and steps away from the post office and a supermarket called Purity Supreme. The room contained a cot, a desk and a small wooden cross on one wall. A sign on the door said cooking was strictly forbidden. A bare window overlooked Massachusetts Avenue, a major thoroughfare with traffic in both directions. Car horns, shrill and prolonged, blared one after another. Flashing sirens heralded endless emergencies and a fleet of buses rumbled past, their doors opening and closing with a powerful hiss, throughout the night. The noise was constantly distracting, at times suffocating. I felt it deep in my ribs, just as I had felt the furious drone of the engine on the *SS Roma*. But there was

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no ship's deck to escape to, no glittering ocean to thrill my soul, no breeze to cool my face, no one to talk to. I was too tired to pace the gloomy corridors of the YMCA in my drawstring pyjamas. Instead I sat at the desk and stared out the window, at the city hall of Cambridge and a row of small shops. In the morning I reported to my job at the Dewey Library, a beige fortlike building by Memorial Drive. I also opened a bank account, rented a post office box, and bought a plastic bowl and a spoon at Woolworth's, a store whose name I recognised from London. I went to Purity Supreme, wandering up and down the aisles, converting ounces to grams and comparing prices to things in England. In the end I bought a small carton of milk and a box of cornflakes. This was my first meal in America. I ate it at my desk. I preferred it to hamburgers or hot dogs, the only alternative I could afford in the coffee shops on Massachusetts Avenue, and, besides, at the time I had yet to consume any beef. Even the simple chore of buying milk was new to me; in London we'd had bottles delivered each morning to our door.

In a week I had adjusted, more or less. I ate cornflakes and milk, morning and night, and bought some bananas for variety, slicing them into the bowl with the edge of my spoon. In addition I bought tea bags and a flask, which the salesman in Woolworth's referred to as a thermos (a flask, he informed me, was used to store whiskey, another thing I had never consumed). For the price of one cup of tea at a coffee shop, I filled the flask with boiling water on my way to work each morning, and brewed the four cups I drank in the course of a day. I bought a larger carton of milk, and learned to leave it on the shaded part of the windowsill, as I had seen another resident at the YMCA do. To pass the time in the evenings I read the *Boston Globe* downstairs, in a spacious room with stained glass windows. I read every article and advertisement so that I would grow familiar with things and, when my eyes grew tired, I slept. Only I did not sleep well. Each night I had to keep the window wide open; it was the only source of air in the stifling room, and the noise was intolerable. I would lie on the cot with my fingers pressed into my ears but when I drifted off to

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sleep, my hands fell away and the noise of the traffic would wake me up again. Pigeon feathers drifted onto the window-sill and, one evening, when I poured milk over my cornflakes, I saw that it had soured. Nevertheless I resolved to stay at the YMCA for six weeks, until my wife's passport and green card were ready. Once she arrived I would have to rent a proper apartment and so, from time to time, I studied the classified section of the newspaper, or stopped in at the housing office at MIT during my lunch-break, to see what was available in my price range. It was in this manner that I discovered a room, for immediate occupancy, in a house on a quiet street, the listing said, for eight dollars per week. I copied the number into my guidebook and dialled from a pay telephone, sorting through the coins with which I was still unfamiliar, smaller and lighter than shillings, heavier and brighter than *paisas*.

'Who is speaking?' a woman demanded. Her voice was bold and clamorous.

'Yes, good afternoon, madame. I am calling about the room, for rent.'

'Harvard or Tech?'

'I beg your pardon?'

'Are you from Harvard or Tech?'

Gathering that Tech referred to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, I replied, 'I work at Dewey Library', adding tentatively, 'at Tech'.

I was given an address and an appointment for seven o'clock that evening. Thirty minutes before the hour I set out, my guidebook in my pocket, my breath fresh with Listerine. I turned down a street shaded with trees, perpendicular to Massachusetts Avenue. Stray blades of grass poked between the cracks of the footpath. In spite of the heat I wore a coat and a tie, regarding the event as I would any other interview; I had never lived in the home of a person who was not Indian. The house, surrounded by a chain-link fence, was off-white with dark brown trim. Unlike the stucco row house I'd lived in, in London, this house, fully detached, was covered with wooded shingles, with a tangle of forsythia bushes plastered against the front and sides. When I pressed the calling bell, the woman

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with whom I had spoken on the phone hollered from what seemed to be just the other side of the door, 'One minute please!'

Several minutes later the door was opened by a tiny, extremely old woman. A mass of snowy hair was arranged like a small sack on top of her head. As I stepped into the house, she sat down on a wooden bench positioned at the bottom of a narrow carpeted staircase. Once she was settled on the bench, in a small pool of light, she peered up at me with undivided attention. She wore a long black skirt that spread like a stiff tent to the floor, and a starched white shirt edged with ruffles at the throat and cuffs. Her hands, folded together in her lap, had long pallid fingers, with swollen knuckles and tough yellow nails. Age had battered her features so that she almost resembled a man, with sharp, shrunken eyes and prominent creases on either side of her nose. Her lips, chapped and faded, had nearly disappeared, and her eyebrows were missing altogether. Nevertheless she looked fierce.

'Look up!' she commanded. She shouted even though I stood only a few feet away. 'Fasten the chain and firmly press that button on the knob! This is the first thing you shall do when you enter, is that clear?'

I locked the door as directed and examined the house. Next to the bench on which the woman sat was a small round table, its legs fully concealed, much like the woman's, by a skirt of lace. The table held a lamp, a transistor radio, a leather change purse with a silver clasp and a telephone. A thick wooden cane coated with a layer of dust was propped against one side. There was a parlour to my right, lined with bookcases and filled with shabby claw-footed furniture. In the corner of the parlour I saw a grand piano with its top down, piled with papers. The piano's bench was missing; it seemed to be the one on which the woman was sitting. Somewhere in the house a clock chimed seven times.

'You're punctual!' the woman proclaimed. ' I expect you shall be so with the rent!'

'I have a letter, madame.' In my jacket pocket was a letter confirming my employment from MIT, which I had brought along to prove that I was indeed from Tech.

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She stared at the letter, then handed it back to me carefully, gripping it with her fingers as if it were a dinner plate heaped with food instead of a sheet of paper. She did not wear glasses and I wondered if she'd read a word of it. 'The last boy was always late! Still owes me eight dollars! Harvard boys aren't what they used to be! Only Harvard and Tech in this house! How's Tech, boy?'

'It is very well.'

'You checked the lock?'

'Yes, madame.'

She slapped the space beside her on the bench with one hand and told me to sit down. For a moment she was silent. Then she intoned, as if she alone possessed this knowledge:

'There is an American flag on the moon!'

'Yes, madame.' Until then I had not thought very much about the moon shot. It was in the newspaper, of course, article upon article. The astronauts had landed on the shores of the Sea of Tranquillity, I had read, travelling farther than anyone in the history of civilization. For a few hours they explored the moon's surface. They gathered rocks in their pockets, described their surroundings (a magnificent desolation, according to one astronaut), spoke by phone to the President and planted a flag in lunar soil. The voyage was hailed as man's most awesome achievement. I had seen full-page photographs in the *Globe*, of the astronauts in their inflated costumes, and read about what certain people in Boston had been doing at the exact moment the astronauts landed, on a Sunday afternoon. A man said that he was operating a swan boat with a radio pressed to his ear; a woman had been baking rolls for her grandchildren.

The woman bellowed, 'A flag on the moon, boy! I heard it on the radio! Isn't that splendid?'

'Yes, madame.'

But she was not satisfied with my reply. Instead she commanded, 'Say 'splendid'!'

I was both baffled and somewhat insulted by the request. It reminded me of the way I was taught multiplication tables as a child, repeating after the master,

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sitting cross-legged, without shoes or pencils, on the floor of my one-room Tollygunge school. It also reminded me of my wedding when I had repeated endless Sanskrit verses after the priest, verses I barely understood, which joined me to my wife. I said nothing.

'Say 'splendid'!' the woman bellowed once again.

'Splendid,' I murmured. I had to repeat the word a second time at the top of my lungs so she could hear. I am soft-spoken by nature and was especially reluctant to raise my voice to an elderly woman whom I had met only moments ago, but she did not appear to be offended. If anything the reply pleased her because her next command was:

'Go see the room!'

I rose from the bench and mounted the narrow carpeted staircase. There were five doors, two on either side of an equally narrow hallway and one at the opposite end. Only one door was partly open. The room contained a twin bed under a sloping ceiling, a brown oval rug, a basin with an exposed pipe, and a chest of drawers. One door, painted white, led to a closet, another to a toilet and a tub. The walls were covered with gray and ivory striped paper. The window was open; net curtains stirred in the breeze. I lifted them away and inspected the view: a small backyard, with a few fruit trees and an empty clothesline. I was satisfied. From the bottom of the stairs I heard the woman demand, 'What is your decision?'

When I returned to the foyer and told her, she picked up the leather change purse on the table, opened the clasp, fished about with her fingers, and produced a key on a thin wire hoop. She informed me that there was a kitchen at the back of the house, accessible through the parlour. I was welcome to use the stove as long as I left it as I found it. Sheets and towels were provided but keeping them clean was my own responsibility. The rent was due Friday mornings on the ledge above the piano keys. 'And no lady visitors!'

'I am a married man, madame.' It was the first time I had announced this fact to anyone.

But she had not heard. 'No lady visitors!' she insisted. She introduced herself as Mrs Croft.

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My wife's name was Mala. The marriage had been arranged by my older brother and his wife. I regarded the proposition with neither objection nor enthusiasm. It was a duty expected of me as it was expected of every man. She was the daughter of a school teacher in Beleghata. I was told that she could cook, knot, embroider, sketch landscapes and recite poems by Tagore, but these talents could not make up for the fact that she did not possess a fair complexion and so a string of men had rejected her to her face. She was twenty-seven, an age when her parents had begun to fear that she would never marry, and so they were willing to ship their only child halfway across the world in order to save her from spinsterhood.

For five nights we shared a bed. Each of those nights, after applying cold cream and braiding her hair, which she tied up at the end with a black cotton string, she turned from me and wept; she missed her parents. Although I would be leaving the country in a few days, custom dictated that she was now a part of my household, and for the next six weeks she was to live with my brother and his wife, cooking, cleaning, serving tea and sweets to guests. I did nothing to console her. I lay on my own side of the bed, reading my guidebook by flashlight and anticipating my journey. At times I thought of the tiny room on the other side of the wall which had belonged to my mother. Now the room was practically empty; the wooden pallet on which she'd once slept was piled with trunks and old bedding. Nearly six years ago, before leaving for London, I had watched her die on that bed, had found her playing with her excrement in her final days. Before we cremated her I had cleaned each of her fingernails with a hairpin and then, because my brother could not bear it, I had assumed the role of eldest son, and had touched the flame to her temple, to release her tormented soul to heaven.

The next morning I moved into the room in Mrs Croft's house. When I unlocked the door, I saw that she was sitting on the piano bench, on the same side as the previous evening. She wore the same black skirt, the same starched white blouse and had her hands folded together the same way in her lap. She looked so much the same that I wondered

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if she'd spent the whole night on the bench. I put my suitcase upstairs, filled my flask with boiling water in the kitchen, and headed off to work. That evening when I came home from the university, she was still there.

'Sit down, boy!' She slapped the space beside her.

I perched beside her on the bench. I had a bag of groceries with me—more milk, more cornflakes and more bananas, for, my inspection of the kitchen earlier in the day had revealed no spare pots, pans, or cooking utensils. There were only two saucepans in the refrigerator, both containing some orange broth, and a copper kettle on the stove.

'Good evening, madame.'

She asked me if I had checked the lock. I told her I had.

For a moment she was silent. Then suddenly she declared, with equal measures of disbelief and delight as the night before, 'There's an American flag on the moon, boy!'

'Yes, madame.'

'A flag on the moon! Isn't that splendid?'

I nodded, dreading what I knew was coming. 'Yes, madame.'

'Say 'splendid'!'

This time I paused, looking to either side in case anyone were there to overhear me, though I knew perfectly well that the house was empty. I felt like an idiot. But is was a small enough thing to ask. 'splendid!' I cried out.

Within days it became our routine. In the mornings, when I left for the library, Mrs Croft was either hidden away in her bedroom, on the other side of the staircase, or she was sitting on the bench, oblivious to my presence, listening to the news or classical music on the radio. But each evening when I returned the same thing happened: she slapped the bench, ordered me to sit down, declared that there was a flag on the moon, and declared that it was splendid. I said it was splendid, too, and then we sat in silence. As awkward as it was, and as endless as it felt to me then, the nightly encounter lasted only about ten minutes; inevitably she would drift off to sleep, her head

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falling abruptly toward her chest, leaving me free to retire to my room. By then, of course, there was no flag on the moon. The astronauts, I had read in the paper, had taken it down before flying back to earth. But I did not have the heart to tell her.

Friday morning, when my first week's rent was due, I went to the piano in the parlour to place my money on the ledge. The piano keys were dull and discoloured. When I pressed one, it made no sound at all. I had put eight one-dollar bills in an envelope and written Mrs Croft's name on the front of it; I was not in the habit of leaving money unmarked and unattended. From where I stood I could see the profile of her tent-shaped skirt. She was sitting on the bench, listening to the radio. It seemed unnecessary to make her get up and walk all the way to the piano. I never saw her walking about and assumed, from the cane always propped against the round table at her side, that she did so with difficulty. When I approached the bench, she peered up at me and demanded:

'What is your business?'

'The rent, madame.'

'On the ledge above the piano keys!'

'I have it here.' I extended the envelope toward her, but her fingers, folded together in her lap, did not budge. I bowed slightly and lowered the envelope, so that it hovered just above her hands. After a moment she accepted, and nodded her head.

That night when I came home, she did not slap the bench but out of habit I sat beside her as usual. She asked me if I had checked the lock but she mentioned nothing about the flag on the moon. Instead she said:

'It was very kind of you!'

'I beg your pardon, madame?'

'Very kind of you!'

She was still holding the envelope in her hands.

On Sunday there was a knock on my door. An elderly woman introduced herself: she was Mrs Croft's daughter, Helen. She walked into the room and looked at each of the walls as if for signs of change, glancing at the shirts that hung in the closet, the neckties draped over the doorknob,

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the box of cornflakes on the chest of drawers, the dirty bowl and spoon in the basin. She was short and thick-waisted, with cropped silver hair and bright pink lipstick. She wore a sleeveless summer dress, a row of white plastic beads and spectacles on a chain that hung like a swing against her chest. The backs of her legs were mapped with dark blue veins and her upper arms sagged like the flesh of a roasted eggplant. She told me she lived in Arlington, a town farther up Massachusetts Avenue. 'I come once a week to bring Mother groceries. Has she sent you packing yet?'

'It is very well, madame.'

'Some of the boys run screaming. But I think she likes you. You're the first boarder she's ever referred to as a gentleman.'

'Not at all, madame.'

She looked at me, noticing my bare feet (I still felt strange wearing shoes indoors, and always removed them before entering my room). 'Are you new to Boston?'

'New to America, madame.'

'From?' She raised her eyebrows.

'I am from Calcutta, India.'

'Is that right? We had a Brazilian fellow, about a year ago. You'll find Cambridge a very international city.'

I nodded, and began to wonder how long our conversation would last. But at that moment we heard Mrs Croft's electrifying voice rising up the stairs. When we stepped into the hallway we heard her hollering:

'You are to come downstairs immediately!'

'What is it?' Helen hollered back.

'Immediately!'

I put on my shoes at once. Helen sighed.

We walked down the staircase. It was too narrow for us to descend side by side, so I followed Helen, who seemed to be in no hurry, and complained at one point that she had a bad knee. 'Have you been walking without your cane?' Helen called out. 'You know you're not supposed to walk without that cane.' She paused, resting her hand on the banister, and looked back at me. 'She slips sometimes.'

For the first time Mrs Croft seemed vulnerable. I pictured her on the floor in front of the bench, flat on her

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back, staring at the ceiling, her feet pointing in opposite directions. But when we reached the bottom of the staircase she was sitting there as usual, her hands folded together in her lap. Two grocery bags were at her feet. When we stood before her she did not slap the bench, or ask us to sit down. She glared.

'What is it, Mother?'

'It's improper!'

'What's improper?'

'It is improper for a lady and gentleman who are not married to one another to hold a private conversation without a chaperone!'

Helen said she was sixty-eight years old, old enough to be my mother, but Mrs Croft insisted that Helen and I speak to each other downstairs, in the parlour. She added that it was also improper for a lady of Helen's station to reveal her age, and to wear a dress so high above the ankle.

'For your information, Mother, it's 1969. What would you do if you actually left the house one day and saw a girl in a miniskirt?'

Mrs Croft sniffed, 'I'd have her arrested.'

Helen shook her head and picked up one of the grocery bags. I picked up the other one and followed her through the parlour and into the kitchen. The bags were filled with cans of soup, which Helen opened up one by one with a few cranks of a can opener. She tossed the old soup in the saucepans into the sink, rinsed the pans under the tap, filled them with soup from the newly opened cans, and put them back in the refrigerator. 'A few years ago she could still open the cans herself,' Helen said. 'She hates that I do it for her now. But the piano killed her hands.' She put on her spectacles, glanced at the cupboards, and spotted my tea bags. 'Shall we have a cup?'

I filled the kettle on the stove. ' I beg your pardon, madame. The piano?'

'She used to give lessons. For forty years. It was how she raised us after my father died.' Helen put her hands on her hips, staring at the open refrigerator. She reached into the back, pulled out a wrapped stick of butter, frowned, and tossed it into the garbage. 'That ought to do it,' she

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said, and put the unopened cans of soup in the cupboard. I sat at the table and watched as Helen washed the dirty dishes, tied up the garbage bag, watered a spider plant over the sink, and poured boiling water into two cups. She handed one to me without milk, the string of the tea bag trailing over the side, and sat down at the table.

'Excuse me, madame, but is it enough?'

Helen took a sip of her tea. Her lipstick left a smiling pink stain on the inside rim of the cup. 'Is what enough?'

'The soup in the pans. Is it enough food for Mrs Croft?'

'She won't eat anything else. She stopped eating solids after she turned one hundred. That was, let's see, three years ago.'

I was mortified. I had assumed Mrs Croft was in her eighties, perhaps as old as ninety. I had never known a person who had lived for over a century. That this person was a widow who lived alone mortified me further still. It was widowhood that had driven my own mother insane. My father, who worked as a clerk at the General Post Office of Calcutta, died of encephalitis when I was sixteen. My mother refused to adjust to life without him; instead, she sank deeper into a world of darkness from which neither I, nor my brother, nor concerned relatives, nor psychiatric clinics on Rashbihari Avenue could save her. What pained me most was to see her so unguarded, to hear her burp after meals or expel gas in front of company without the slightest embarrassment. After my father's death my brother abandoned his schooling and began to work in the jute mill he would eventually manage, in order to keep the household running. And so it was my job to sit by my mother's feet and study for my exams as she counted and recounted the bracelets on her arm as if they were the beads of an abacus. We tried to keep an eye on her. Once she had wandered half naked to the tram depot before we were able to bring her inside again.

'I am happy to warm Mrs Croft's soup in the evenings,' I suggested, removing the tea bag from my cup and squeezing out the liquor. 'It is no trouble.'

Helen looked at her watch, stood up, and poured the rest of her tea into the sink. 'I wouldn't if I

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were you. That's the sort of thing that would kill her altogether.'

That evening, when Helen had gone back to Arlington and Mrs Croft and I were alone again, I began to worry. Now that I knew how very old she was, I worried that something would happen to her in the middle of the night, or when I was out during the day. As vigorous as her voice was, and imperious as she seemed, I knew that even a scratch or a cough could kill a person that old; each day she lived, I knew, was something of a miracle. Although Helen had seemed friendly enough, a small part of me worried that she might accuse me of negligence if anything were to happen. Helen didn't seem worried. She came and went, bringing soup for Mrs Croft, one Sunday after the next.

In this manner the six weeks of that summer passed. I came home each evening, after my hours at the library, and spent a few minutes on the piano bench with Mrs Croft. I gave her a bit of my company, and assured her that I had checked the lock, and told her that the flag on the moon was splendid. Some evenings I sat beside her long after she had drifted off to sleep, still in awe of how many years she had spent on this earth. At times I tried to picture the world she had been born into, in 1866—a world, I imagined, filled with women in long black skirts and chaste conversations in the parlour. Now when I looked at her hands with their swollen knuckles folded together in her lap, I imagined them smooth and slim, striking the piano keys. At times I came downstairs, before going to sleep, to make sure that she was sitting upright on the bench, or was safe in her bedroom. On Fridays I made sure to put the rent in her hands. There was nothing I could do for her beyond these simple gestures. I was not her son and apart from those eight dollars, I owed her nothing.

At the end of August, Mala's passport and green card were ready. I received a telegram with her flight information; my brother's house in Calcutta had no telephone. Around that time I also received a letter from her, written only a few days after we had parted. There was no salutation; addressing me by name would have assumed an intimacy we had not

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yet discovered. It contained only a few lines. 'I write in English in preparation for the journey. Here I am very much lonely. Is it very cold there. Is there snow. Yours, Mala.'

I was not touched by her words. We had spent only a handful of days in each other's company. And yet we were bound together; for six weeks she had worn an iron bangle on her wrist, and applied vermilion powder to the part in her hair, to signify to the world that she was a bride. In those six weeks I regarded her arrival as I would the arrival of a coming month, or season—something inevitable but meaningless at the time. So little did I know her that, while details of her face sometimes rose to my memory, I could not conjure up the whole of it.

A few days after receiving the letter, as I was walking to work in the morning, I saw an Indian woman on the other side of Massachusetts Avenue, wearing a sari with its free end nearly dragging on the footpath, and pushing a child in a stroller. An American woman with a small black dog on a leash was walking to one side of her. Suddenly the dog began barking. From the other side of the street I watched as the Indian woman, startled, stopped in her path, at which point the dog leapt up and seized the end of the sari between its teeth. The American woman scolded the dog, appeared to apologise, and walked quickly away, leaving the Indian woman to fix her sari in the middle of the footpath, and quiet her crying child. She did not see me standing there and eventually she continued on her way. Such a mishap, I realised that morning, would soon be my concern. It was my duty to take care of Mala, to welcome her and protect her. I would have to buy her her first pair of snow boots, her first winter coat. I would have to tell her which streets to avoid, which way the traffic came, tell her to wear her sari so that the free end did not drag on the footpath. A five-mile separation from her parents, I recalled with some irritation, had caused her to weep.

Unlike Mala, I was used to it all by then: used to cornflakes and milk, used to Helen's visits, used to sitting on the bench with Mrs Croft. The only thing I was not used to was Mala. Nevertheless I did what I had to do. I went to

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the housing office at MIT and found a furnished apartment a few blocks away, with a double bed and a private kitchen and bath, for forty dollars a week. One last Friday I handed Mrs Croft eight one-dollar bills in an envelope, brought my suitcase downstairs, and informed her that I was moving. She put my key into her change purse. The last thing she asked me to do was to hand her the cane propped against the table so that she could walk to the door and lock it behind me. 'Good-bye, then,' she said, and retreated back into the house. I did not expect any display of emotion but I was disappointed all the same. I was only a boarder, a man who paid her a bit of money and passed in and out of her home for six weeks. Compared to a century, it was no time at all.

At the airport I recognised Mala immediately. The free end of her sari did not drag on the floor but was draped in a sign of bridal modesty over her head, just as it had draped my mother until the day my father died. Her thin brown arms were stacked with gold bracelets, a small red circle was painted on her forehead and the edges of her feet were tinted with a decorative red dye. I did not embrace her, or kiss her, or take her hand. Instead I asked her, speaking Bengali for the first time in America, if she was hungry.

I told her I had prepared some egg curry at home. 'What did they give you to eat on the plane?'

'I didn't eat.'

'All the way from Calcutta?'

'The menu said oxtail soup.'

'But surely there were other items.'

'The thought of eating an ox's tail made me lose my appetite.'

When we arrived home, Mala opened up one of her suitcases and presented me with two pullover sweaters, both made with bright blue wool, which she had knitted in the course of our separation, one with a V neck, the other covered with cables. I tried them on; both were tight under the arms. She had also brought me two new pairs of drawstring pyjamas, a letter from my brother and a packet of loose Darjeeling tea. I had no present for her apart from the egg curry. We sat at a bare table, each of us staring at

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our plates. We ate with our hands, another thing I had not yet done in America.

'The house is nice,' she said, 'also the egg curry'. With her left hand she held the end of her sari to her chest, so it would not slip off her head.

'I don't know many recipes.'

She nodded, peeling the skin off each of her potatoes before eating them. At one point the sari slipped to her shoulders. She readjusted it at once.

'There is no need to cover your head,' I said. 'I don't mind. It doesn't matter here.'

She kept it covered anyway.

I waited to get used to her, to her presence at my side, at my table and in my bed, but a week later we were still strangers. I still was not used to coming home to an apartment that smelled of steamed rice, and finding that the basin in the bathroom was always wiped clean, our two toothbrushes lying side by side, a cake of Pears soap from India resting in the soap dish. I was not used to the fragrance of the coconut oil she rubbed every other night into her scalp, or the delicate sound her bracelets made as she moved about the apartment. In the mornings she was always awake before I was. The first morning when I came into the kitchen she had heated up the leftovers and set a plate with a spoonful of salt on its edge on the table, assuming I would eat rice for breakfast, as most Bengali husbands did. I told her cereal would do and the next morning when I came into the kitchen she had already poured the cornflakes into my bowl. One morning she walked with me down Massachusetts Avenue to MIT, where I gave her a short tour of the campus. On the way we stopped at a hardware store and I made a copy of the key, so that she could let herself into the apartment. The next morning before I left for work she asked me for a few dollars. I parted with them reluctantly but I knew that this, too, was now normal. When I came home from work there was a potato peeler in the kitchen drawer, and a tablecloth on the table, and chicken curry made with fresh garlic and ginger on the stove. We did not have a television in those days. After dinner I read the newspaper, while Mala sat at

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the kitchen table, working on a cardigan for herself with more of the bright blue wool, or writing letters home.

At the end of our first week, on Friday, I suggested going out. Mala set down her knitting and disappeared into the bathroom. When she emerged I regretted the suggestion; she had put on a clean silk sari and extra bracelets, and coiled her hair with a flattering side part on top of her head. She was prepared as if for a party, or at the very least for the cinema, but I had no such destination in mind. The evening air was balmy. We walked several blocks down Massachusetts Avenue, looking into the windows of restaurants and shops. Then, without thinking, I led her down the quiet street where for so many nights I had walked alone.

'This is where I lived before you came,' I said, stopping at Mrs Croft's chain-link fence.

'In such a big house?'

'I had a small room upstairs. At the back.'

'Who else lives there?'

'A very old woman.'

'With her family?'

'Alone.'

'But who takes care of her?'

I opened the gate. 'For the most part she takes care of herself.'

I wondered if Mrs Croft would remember me; I wondered if she had a new boarder to sit with her on the bench each evening. When I pressed the bell I expected the same long wait as that day of our first meeting, when I did not have a key. But this time the door was opened almost immediately, by Helen. Mrs Croft was not sitting on the bench. The bench was gone.

'Hello there,' Helen said, smiling with her bright pink lips at Mala.

'Mother's in the parlour. Will you be visiting awhile?'

'As you wish, madame.'

'Then I think I'll run to the store, if you don't mind. She had a little accident. We can't leave her alone these days, not even for a minute.'

I locked the door after Helen and walked into the

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parlour. Mrs Croft was lying flat on her back, her head on a peach-coloured cushion, a thin white quilt spread over her body. Her hands were folded together on top of her chest. When she saw me she pointed at the sofa and told me to sit down. I took my place as directed but Mala wandered over to the piano and sat on the bench which was now positioned where it belonged.

'I broke my hip! ' Mrs Croft announced, as if no time had passed.

'Oh dear, madame.'

'I fell off the bench!'

'I am so sorry, madame.'

'It was the middle of the night! Do you know what I did, boy?'

I shook my head.

'I called the police!'

She stared up at the ceiling and grinned sedately, exposing a crowded row of long grey teeth. Not one was missing. 'What do you say to that, boy?'

As stunned as I was, I knew what I had to say.With no hesitation at all, I cried out, 'Splendid!'

Mala laughed then. Her voice was full of kindness, her eyes bright with amusement. I had never heard her laugh before, and it was loud enough so that Mrs Croft had heard, too. She turned to Mala and glared.

'Who is she, boy?'

'She is my wife, madame.'

Mrs Croft pressed her head at an angle against the cushion to get a better look, 'Can you play the piano?'

'No, madame,' Mala replied.

'Then stand up!'

Mala rose to her feet, adjusting the end of her sari over her head and holding it to her chest, and, for the first time since her arrival, I felt sympathy. I remembered my first days in London, learning how to take the tube to Russell Square, riding an escalator for the first time, being unable to understand that when the man cried 'piper' it meant 'paper', being unable to decipher, for a whole year, that the conductor said 'mind the gap' as the train pulled away from each station. Like me, Mala had travelled far from

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home. Not knowing where she was going, or what she would find, for no reason other than to be my wife. As strange as it seemed, I knew in my heart that one day her death would affect me and, stranger still, that mine would affect her. I wanted somehow to explain this to Mrs Croft, who was still scrutinising Mala from top to toe with what seemed to be placid disdain. I wondered if Mrs Croft had ever seen a woman in a sari, with a dot painted on her forehead and bracelets stacked on her wrists. I wondered what she would object to. I wondered if she could see the red dye still vivid on Mala's feet, all but obscured by the bottom edge of her sari. At last Mrs Croft declared, with equal measures of disbelief and delight I knew well:

'She is a perfect lady!'

Now it was I who laughed. I did so quietly and Mrs Croft did not hear me. But Mala had heard, and, for the first time, we looked at each other and smiled.

I like to think of that moment in Mrs Croft's parlour as the moment when the distance between Mala and me began to lessen. Although we were not yet fully in love, I like to think of the months that followed as a honeymoon of sorts. Together we explored the city and met other Bengalis, some of whom are still friends today. We discovered that a man named Bill sold fresh fish on Prospect Street, and that a shop in Harvard Square, called Cardullo's, sold bay leaves and cloves. In the evenings we walked to the Charles River to watch sailboats drift across the water, or had ice cream cones in Harvard Yard. We bought an Instamatic camera with which to document our life together, and I took pictures of her posing in front of the Prudential building so that she could send them to her parents. At night we kissed, shy at first but quickly bold, and discovered pleasure and solace in each other's arms. I told her about my voyage on the *SS Roma*, and about Finsbury Park and the YMCA, and my evenings on the bench with Mrs Croft. When I told her stories about my mother, she wept. It was Mala who consoled me when, reading the *Globe* one evening, I came across Mrs Croft's obituary. I had not thought of her in several months—by then those six weeks of the summer were already a remote interlude in my past—but when I

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learned of her death I was stricken, so much so that when Mala looked up from her knitting she found me staring at the wall, the newspaper neglected in my lap, unable to speak. Mrs Croft's was the first death I mourned in America, for, hers was the first life I had admired; she had left this world at last, ancient and alone, never to return.

As for me, I have not strayed much farther: Mala and I live in a town about twenty miles from Boston, on a tree-lined street much like Mrs Croft's, in a house we own, with a garden that saves us from buying tomatoes in summer, and room for guests. We are American citizens now so that we can collect social security when it is time. Though we visit Calcutta every few years, and bring back more drawstring pyjamas and Darjeeling tea, we have decided to grow old here. I work in a small college library. We have a son who attends Harvard University. Mala no longer drapes the end of her sari over her head, or weeps at night for her parents but, occasionally, she weeps for our son. So we drive to Cambridge to visit him, or bring him home for a weekend, so that he can eat rice with us with his hands and speak in Bengali, things we sometimes worry he will no longer do after we die.

Whenever we make that drive, I always make it a point to take Massachusetts Avenue, in spite of the traffic. I barely recognise the buildings now but each time I am there I return instantly to those six weeks as if they were only the other day, and I slow down and point to Mrs Croft's street, saying to my son, here was my first home in America where I lived with a woman who was 103. 'Remember?' Mala says, and smiles, amazed, as I am, that there was ever a time that we were strangers. My son always expresses his astonishment, not at Mrs Croft's age, but at how little I paid in rent, a nearly inconceivable amount to him as a flag on the moon was to a woman born in 1866. In my son's eyes I see the ambition that had first hurled me across the world. In a few years he will graduate and pave his way, alone and unprotected. But I remind myself that he has a father who is still living, a mother who is happy and strong. Whenever he is discouraged, I tell him that if I can survive on three continents, then there is no obstacle he cannot

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conquer. While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years. I know that my achievement is quite ordinary. I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home and certainly I am not the first. Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have travelled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination.

About the Author

Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indian Bengali, born in London (1967), lives in New York with her husband and son. This story is from her collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), a bestseller in 2000 both in U.S.A. and elsewhere. In addition to the Pulitzer Prize, she has received a number of awards for the work which has been translated into twenty-nine languages.

Her stories revolve around the lives of Indians in diasporic situations, i.e., of Indians living abroad, Indians who have been brought up in traditional India but are now encountering the baffling new world [U.S.A.].

Understanding the Text

1. Indicate the details that tell us that the narrator was not very financially comfortable during his stay in London.
2. How did the narrator adjust to the ways of life first in London and then in Cambridge, U.S.A.?
3. What do you understand of the character of Mrs Croft from the story?
4. What kind of a relationship did Mrs Croft share with her daughter Helen?
5. How does the narrator bring out the contrast between the Indian way of life and American society? Do you think his wife Mala adjusted comfortably to the new way of life?
6. How does the bond of affection between Mrs Croft and the narrator evolve?

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Talking About the Text

Discuss in pairs or in small groups

1. Living abroad is challenging in many ways.
2. The Indian family system offers more security to the aged than what is found in the West.
3. The eccentricities of the old are often endearing.

Appreciation

1. Discuss the manner in which the author interweaves details of the narrator's family with the flow of the main narrative.
2. 'Mrs Croft's was the first death I mourned in America, for, hers was the first life I had admired; she had left this world at last, ancient and alone, never to return'—how do these lines encapsulate the bond that is possible between two strangers?
3. Examine the pieces of conversation in the story. How do they reflect the worldview of each of the speakers?
4. There are many instances of gentle humour in the story. Point out some of these and state how this contributes to the interest of the narration.

Language Work

1. 'Don't expect **an English cup of tea**'—how does this phrase bring out the contrast between the English and American attitudes?
2. How did the narrator learn to distinguish between 'a flask' and 'a thermos'?
3. It took the narrator quite some time to understand that what he heard as 'piper', in fact, meant 'paper' and the phrase 'mind the gap' in the Tube. What do you think caused the problem?
4. Make a list of items that are referred to differently in British and American English, for example, 'lift' (BE) 'elevator' (AmE).
5. See if you understand what the following words that are parts of a house mean. Look up the dictionary if you don't.

parlour	foyer	lounge	porch
lobby	attic	portico	

Suggested Reading

1. *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri.

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7 Glory at Twilight

Bhabani Bhattacharya

☛ *Look for these expressions in the story and guess the meaning from the context*

brusquely	attuned himself
queer rhythmic frenzy	wrenching
flush of prosperity	daze of bewilderment
wide-eyed wonder and eager homage	
talking animatedly	tremulous deliberation
on terms of a perpetual feud	

The slow, narrow-gauge Indian train with its awkward freak of an engine had a way of making unauthorised stops for no good reason, between fields of corn or at the foot of a village—it was said that the guard signalled a halt to pluck a pumpkin or ripe melons from its stem or to buy fistfuls of green gram from a peasant. Some of the passengers grumbled and sat with drawn brows, composing in their minds angry letters to Authority, or to the Press, but others seized the chance to slip merrily out of doors for a breath of air and a view of the green fields.

Satyajit, languid on the cushioned bench now vacated by the other occupants, reached out for his cigarettes but, on second thought, withdrew his hand brusquely. That won't do, he told himself with a stern shake of his head. His smoke was rationed. He had attuned himself in the past month to a fast-growing list of denials, large and small, and this was one. How can he afford the unrestricted luxury of chain smoking? Life lay sharpening to realities that still had the semblance of an undreamable dream.

He winced, the turning wheel of fortune in his unhappy eye, as always. Along the orbit of reminiscence he went

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round and round, pulled by a force beyond his will. The banking establishment of which he had attained control. The amazing tempo of it all. Luck had come his way, undeniably, but behind it was his mind, his initiative, grit, energy. Starting as a mere clerk he had become Managing Director. And now? What now?

Tall, thin, near forty, he had sharp features, the hair receding on his temple in wide shiny smooth patches. His eyes hated glare and he wore smart eye-glasses to shield them. His mouth, thin-lipped, would tighten in repose to a line that suggested strength of will but might have been only pride.

'What now?' he said to himself in an underbreath. Those words had become his obsession. 'What now?'

He had no business to be on this wretched train on a neglected railroad, travelling away from the city where he must look for work, for the means of living. With the sudden collapse of his bank, all his private assets were gone overnight; the equities; the house on Tagore Street; even the two cars, his and his wife's. A mercy that she was away from the scene, with her parents at Delhi, and unaware of the full extent of the ruin. A telegram had come last Tuesday announcing the safe birth of her child. Their first-born, for he had married late in life. His son, his heir. And he had sold off his diamond ring to send his young wife a remittance for the name-giving rites.

She had married a man of fortune—that made it harder for him in this crisis. True, she knew all about his earlier life. But that was story-book stuff. It could be narrated happily to their first-born when he grew older. The story lay killed by its sequel—failure. Glory was all overlaid with dark shame. Glory was dead.

It would be easy enough today if there were none else to think of except himself. Born in a humble village home, self-educated, struggle had been his life-breath. How grateful he was for the clerkship he secured. A turning of the wheel of fortune? he had wondered. The next turning, a year after, was more dramatic. What made him give a fixed look to the man beyond the brass grille of the counter? The cheque presented for encashment was not a large sum.

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Eye upon eye. Alarm vivid in the face and the hand on the counter shaking curiously. Surprised, stirred by a quick impulse, he took the cheque to the accounts desk, compared the signature with the one on record. It tallied. But that face, that hand. A hundred reasons, none connected with the cheque, could explain the face and hand. Even so, the impulse led him to the telephone. 'Sir, have you signed a bearer cheque for Rs 2,000? It has yesterday's date...' 'Rs 2,000? No.' His heart felt pain for lack of air. 'Sir, are you sure? The signature seems okay.' In the next instance he was back to his counter in a rush. Where was the man? There, close to the exit, and the face turning back for a moment wore stark fear. He was going away.

Feet bounded up the counter. The bank clerk hunted down his prey on the gravel path, twenty paces from the front door. There was no struggle. The man crumpled down in a heap. He squatted with head between his hands, looking down, tears rolling down. 'Why did you have to commit forgery?' 'She has TB.' 'She?' 'She is dying for want of medicine.' 'Who?' 'My wife. I saw no other means. I give lessons in Maths to the rich man's son. That money...' The head between the hands wagged from side to side in a queer rhythmic frenzy.

That was the way the clerk grew into an accountant. He deserved what he had gained. He was not made to be a mere clerk. Lost in the thrill, he had honest contempt for his stepping-stone, the forgerer. You could not commit such a crime even to save your dying wife. But today, as he sat on his lone bench on the train, he saw mind-pictures and felt troubled. The crouched figure on the gravel path wrapped in mute grieving. The prisoner at the bar, face frozen, as though he had died within himself. Had he anything to say to the Court? the Judge had asked. 'Punish me.' 'Is that all?' 'Punish me as a killer.' 'Killer?' 'I have put my wife to shame. Shame kills as fast as TB.'

Yes, that wretched one had turned the wheel for him with his trembling hand. From that point the wheel attained a volition of its own, moving continuously. He had every reason to be grateful to the forgerer. Too late now to seek him out, give him a chance to live?

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Too late. He himself sorely needed a chance to live. The banking business lay around him in a broken mass and there was he, prostrate on his face in the wreckage, sucking its dust. All his fault. He had tried to overreach himself. Each wrong step was now clear in time's perspective. The run on the bank had come all too suddenly though. Failure had a tempo far faster than success.

He had great need to fly from himself—that was why he was on this train. A letter had come in the nick of time offering him an excuse, a temporary relief from the wrenching within.

'The wedding of my fifth daughter, Beena, is to take place on the twentieth of this month. I have kept you posted with the progress of negotiations. I seek your benediction as in the case of my second, third and fourth daughters—Kamini, Damini and Suhashi. With Beena wedded, there will be only Aruna left, and she is in her tenth year. Your benediction alone can pull me through the present daughter crisis. That is all I have to say—Your helpless Uncle Srinath.'

Daughter crisis, indeed! mused Satyajit with a dim smile. Uncle Srinath, a neighbour at Shantipur village but no blood relation, seemed to have been producing his numerous daughters secure in the faith that others would bear the brunt of the repeated crises of their marriage needs. And Satyajit, in the flush of prosperity, had been more than open-handed. It was a matter of pride, self-satisfaction.

In his younger days, the village people had not thought much of him, had not seen in him any special gift or brilliance. One of the common herd. That was all the more reason why he enjoyed success. He needed the wide-eyed wonder and eager homage of Uncle Srinath and the like while they had use and longing for his money. It was plain give-and-take.

All that was over. Fallen from his castle in the clouds, Satyajit must tread the earthly ways of humble folk. But he could not deny the old man altogether. He must send some help. He had pondered over the amount. He had to ponder over each rupee before he spent it.

Then, all at once, he had come to a decision. He would go to Shantipur and attend the marriage. This would be a

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welcome relief—the city was suffocating him. His mind would be freshened, his strength renewed for the coming struggle by a return to the physical scene which had been his starting point in life. Let that be his starting point once more, outwardly as much as in the spirit. He would also take this chance to look at his ancestral house and fish-pond, both leased out, bits of property still intact amid the vast demolition. Those he must pass on to his wife as his last gift. And he had sent word to Uncle Srinath about his arrival on the marriage day.

The engine came to life with a shrill of warning. The passenger hurried back. Another half-hour and it was Shantipur. Satyajit leaned out of the door, his eyes looking for Uncle Srinath on the station platform, where many people stood crowded together, alert and apparently excited, one of them holding aloft the national flag on a bamboo pole. A political celebrity on the train? Strange that Uncle Srinath, who had always feared politics, was leading the group. Suddenly, there was a rush of legs towards Satyajit as he stepped down. The legs stopped and a booming chorus followed. *Swagatam*! Welcome!'

A small girl with an awestruck face stepped up with a jasmine garland in her hand. Satyajit stood in a daze of bewilderment as the girl rose on tiptoe to place the chain of flowers around his neck. He bent mechanically to receive the offer, not knowing what it meant. It was obviously a mistake, a very curious one.

'Welcome!' the voices rang again. Then, an expectant hush. Uncle Srinath turned round to the group. On the high cheekbones and grey stubble of his face was a clear coating of strong elation.

'Friends and brothers! Bengal has seen greatness in almost every field of action. I shall not belittle your knowledge by citing names. It is only in trade and industry that Bengal has lagged behind sadly—the plums of business have gone to people from upcountry or from overseas. That is why our hearts grow big with pride at the sight of a son of Bengal, a son of our own Shantipur village, who has attained great success in that field, that

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forbidden field, and become the glory of the motherland, *Swagatam*! Welcome!'

'*Swagatam*!' the combined voices roared while the tricolour flag on its tall pole nodded approvingly.

When Satyajit slipped down from the ox cart at the door of a mud-brick house, a knot of women waiting tensely with brass water-bowls rushed up and stooped over his feet, scrambling for the privilege to wash his feet with cool water. Satyajit shrank back, embarrassed.

'It's my Beena's privilege,' cried Srinath, smiling. 'This is her day. Let Beena alone wash and wipe the reverent feet. All her life she will remember this honour befalling her on the auspicious day of her marriage.'

Satyajit looked at the girl who stepped forward, shy, slender with large pensive eyes in a graceful face. 'So this is the bride,' he smiled at her and touched her hair in the gesture of blessing. 'I hope the groom is worthy of this girl,' he said as she knelt down to unlace his shoes. She slipped off his socks and poured cool water to freshen his feet, washing them with keen care. As her slim fingers went between his toes, he wiggled them, for he felt ticklish. Presently he sat on a carpet in the inner verandah with a plateful of sweets and a glass of whey while Kamini, Damini and Suhashi sat near him on their haunches and waved palm leaf fans with all their energy, as though each passing minute had to be fully used before their hands were deprived of the privilege. Sweat

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broke out on their faces and they shifted their fans from right hand to left and again to the right. Their mother, who stood by, now spoke in a murmur, husky with emotion.

'You have been more of a father to these girls than he,' jerking her head at her invisible husband. 'But for the bigness of your heart, they would still be maids under this room, shooting up in years and in height with no chance of having husband and home.' She lifted her sari fringes to her eyes, wiping off two grateful tears.

The meal over, Uncle Srinath, who had been shuttling between the inner verandah and the outer quarters, now stopped, leaning over his guest.

'Beena has been given the old jewellery of her mother,' he confided. 'So, that part of the dowry problem has been met. Her three married sisters, whom you see before you and who owe all their bliss in life to your benediction, have given her the marriage gifts she must have: sari, jacket, chemise. Also brass utensils for her new household.'

'Good! Good!' Satyajit cried happily. He had Rs 200 in his purse and had wondered how much of it had to go into the marriage pool. May be Rs 100; or, rather, Rs 101, since a figure ending with zero was not propitious. During the meal he had been slowly adding to that figure: ten, twenty, finally stopping at an additional fifty. Now that Beena had got all she needed, he could just as well slice a goodly bit off the amount. Let it be Rs 101. The fifty rupees saved would buy a perambulator for his newborn son.

'Your benediction is our blind-man's staff,' Srinath went on. 'Do I have to say more?' He apparently decided that he did not, for he changed the topic abruptly. 'My house has become a place of pilgrimage. You are the pride of the village, its strength. In you the people see their own inmost dream fulfilled. Will you now show yourself for a minute to the devotees who sit waiting—'

Satyajit followed his host. His devotees were seated on a floor mat, talking animatedly, and at the sight of him there was an instant hush. Hands joined to his chest, Satyajit made salutation to all. He caught sight of the schoolmaster who had taught him as a boy and made a

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deep obeisance. Swelled with pride, the old man swept the floor mat group with a superior glance before he spoke:

'Didn't I say? Didn't I say a hundred and one times in those far off days that the light of genius blazed on the face of my young pupil? That he stood apart from every other young pig—' He broke short and yielded to a violent fit of coughing to cover up the slip. Presently he resumed: 'That he with the light of genius on his face was afar from the world where the other youngsters dwelt? Why, I predicted that he would be a High Court Judge—'

Satyajit burst into a laugh. 'Alas, I am no High Court Judge'. 'Even more, much more!' counted the old man. His good memory reached back to the boy with whom he had been on terms of a perpetual feud. Always bent on some kind of mischief—he did have an inventive mind that way! Arithmetic was his bogey. How does he count all his pile of money? He owns a million, if Srinath is to be believed. A million? And the old man hastened to add a brushful of colour to the drab picture presented by memory. 'Even in those far-off days I could see two shadow forms about him, clear as life—Saraswati at his left, Lakshmi at his right. And I knew even then that the twin goddesses of knowledge and wealth, though hating the sight of each other, had for once united, stayed together, drawn by their common love.' He lifted joined palms to his forehead, offering salutation—perhaps to those goddesses.

Satyajit was determined to enjoy himself. He felt a twinge of regret that he had not thought of coming to Shantipur and basking in the people's homage when it was truly his due. Now he was an impostor. He impersonated the man he had been a few weeks before. He made an angry jerk of his hand about his face, waving off a sand-fly—and the regret. Let him be happy for the day even with a false echo, let him be wrapped a while in the lingering twilight splendour of departed glory. Tommorow he would be in the full fury of a stream, tugged under water, fighting for life. Today he would have his last breath of peace, freedom, content.

Through the rest of the day he went round the village, meeting the elders, sipping the proffered milk of green

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coconuts. He visited his house occupied by a tenant. His house—and he touched the walls possessively. This small house gave him a feeling of security which had not come to him even from his huge city mansion. He spent an hour by the fish pond. His pond—and he sprinkled a palmful of its water on his head. A good-sized carp landed at the end of his hook. When he came home with the catch, Uncle Srinath gazed at it raptly—one would have thought he had never before seen such fish. 'What gills!' he breathed in apparent ecstasy. He patted the head of the fish with an affectionate hand. 'Bride and groom shall eat curried portions of this auspicious one when they break their marriage fast at midnight. That will bring them all the blessings that life can give'. It was near twilight when the groom's party arrived in ox carts and palanquins. Conches blew welcome. Young women gathered at the dooryard and gave the shrill traditional greeting expressive of great joy; Ulu-ulu-ulu-ulu-ulu! When the bridal party was well settled, chewing betel leaf and waiting for the marriage hour as prescribed by the almanac, Satyajit felt for his purse. Time now to part with Rs 101. Srinath, reading his thoughts, took him to the secluded darkness under a fig-tree in the backyard 'My begging bowl is ready,' he announced happily.

'Yes, yes,' Satyajit nodded.

'The cash dowry stands fixed. Only Rs 2001.'

'What!' Satyajit felt a hard blow in the pit of his stomach.

'That is all.'

'Rs 2001?'

Srinath smiled. 'Everything else is provided for, even the cost of the marriage feast. Only this last item awaits your benediction.'

Benediction—Srinath's favourite word. Nothing abstract in its meaning. It could be interpreted only in terms of money. Satyajit felt a burning inside him. He had stretched his leg right into the snare of benediction, unthinkingly. How could he be so very stupid?

Srinath broke the silence with a half laugh. 'This drop in the ocean of your fortune. It shames me to mention the petty figure.'

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'Why didn't you write and tell me?' The voice was harsh.

The half laugh repeated itself. 'Have I no sense? I am not such a big ass as I look. What! Mention money to a millionaire! And such a pittance. A drop in the ocean.'

'A drop,' echoed Satyajit, his mouth dry. This was the moment for confession. He was even worse off than Srinath. Hard struggle lay ahead of him for bare survival. Srinath would understand.

'Millionaire!' Rhapsody in the voice. Plain worship on the face. A devotee, prayerful before his god. ' We bask in your benediction. Our life-spark itself is held in your fist; you can destroy it just by closing your fingers tight. Words cannot say what I feel —'

Yes, the god had been a millionaire, truly. That was yesterday. Today... Confession stuck in his throat, clutched by the millionaire's dead hand. Better give an excuse. He had come rushing in the midst of heavy work and had not thought of equipping himself with adequate cash. That would sound plausible. Later—it wouldn't matter if Srinath discovered the terrible truth later, as he must.

Something stronger than he spoke with his tongue. 'I had to catch the morning train—there was no time to go to the bank. Maybe someone in the village—' The words 'cash a cheque' were almost on his lips. 'Someone in the village will advance a loan—'

Uncle Srinath rushed out of the house, panic on his face. He had been under the impression that a millionaire always had his pockets stuffed with money. Satyajit returned to the assembled guests. Instantly the groom, on his foot-high satin-draped platform, fat round cushions on three sides of him, was forgotten. Silence. All eyes took their fill of the rich man. A god on the pedestal of fortune. He too sat quiet, the tiredness within him heavier than even before. The peace he had attained erstwhile was gone. He longed to see the face of his new-born son. The rich man's son who would never ride in a perambulator.

Srinath returned in half an hour. His face looked angry. Satyajit saw his beckoning hand, rose heavily to his feet, and stepped outside, away from the people.

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'Only one person in Shantipur can produce so much cash at this late hour,' said Srinath, 'Harish, the money-lender. That shark refuses to make an advance though.'

The swift flood of relief! 'Harish does not trust me?' Moneylenders did have a sixth sense. There was no knowing when Harish would have got his money back—perhaps never.

'Preposterous! Not to trust the word and signature of a millionaire! Harish is off his senses; or, is it malice?' The voice collected anger. 'I could drag him to you and make him grovel at your feet and rub his fat nose on the ground.'

Satyajit could be generous. 'No need, no need. Trust is out of date in these cynical times.' The wonder of it—his leg was off the snare of benediction!

'Where will our India be if such things are tolerated? What is Nehru doing about it? Is there no one to tell him how things stand in the country?'

Satyajit patted the excited man on the shoulder, soothingly. Srinath controlled himself with visible effort. His face saddened. 'What is to be done?' he moaned. 'The groom's father is a man of stone. He will break off the marriage unless cash is paid to him before the ceremony starts. Who will ever marry Beena after such dishonour?'

Satyajit wagged his head in befitting sympathy. 'If only you had written to me. Just two words or three. Anyway, do not be worried. You will find another suitable match, a better one maybe. Who can foresee the ways of destiny?' He felt for his purse the second time. He ought to restore the fifty rupees he had cut. Let it be Rs 151. Even if there would be no perambulator for his son—

Srinath cleared his throat twice. 'It shames me to tell you the full story.'

'Yes?'

'Harish is willing to pay.'

'What! you have just said—'

'He will pay against security. He wants security, that evil-eyed shark. Your house and fish-pond. The madness! To think that house and pond have more weight than a millionaire's signature!'

Satyajit trembled within him. 'House and pond,' he murmurmed to himself. The only possessions that had not

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toppled into the deluge. They were all he could give to his wife—

'All the old values destroyed, where will our India be? Has Nehru no sense to understand this? What! A pond weighs more than a millionaire's word, a house is better security than the signature of his hand! Yet, what else is to be done?' Palms folded together made supplication. 'What else is to be done in the daughter crisis?'

Satyajit had a queer drugged look. And the dead voice of the millionaire came from his throat. 'Let the money-lender pay on those terms.'

'The insult, what about the insult?' Srinath's wrathful hand cleaved the air. 'When the thing is done, I will make the shark rub his fat nose on the ground at your feet; I will do that, be sure. You will also see the whole village spit at the shark, *thoo*!'

The deed was signed, the house was gay with marriage music. Satyajit walked off to the deep dark under the fig tree, all by himself.

'What now,' he said under his breath, and a dim smile pinched the corners of his lips as he stuck between them the cork tip of a cigarette, the last one in the tin, and lifted a lit match with slow tremulous deliberation.

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About the Author

Bhabani Bhattacharya (1906–1988), one of the foremost Indian writers of fiction in English, won acclaim for his novel, So *Many Hungers* (1947), which presents a vivid picture of the Bengal famine during World War II. He won the Sahitya Akademi Award for *Shadow from Ladakh (1966).* He also wrote a number of short stories.

'Glory at Twilight' is taken from the collection, *Steel Hawk and Other Stories.*

Understanding the Text

1. Give reasons for the following

   a. Satyajit attending the village wedding.

b. Satyajit's recollection of the forgerer when he was on the train.

c. Srinath and his family members' eager expectation of Satyajit's arrival.

d. Srinath's disappointment with Satyajit.

e. Satyajit's feeling that he was an impostor.

f. Satyajit not disclosing his present financial status to his uncle.

2. Describe the cycle of events in Satyajit's life that brought him back to where he began.

Talking About the Text

Discuss in pairs

1. It is difficult to adjust to a fall from glory.
2. 'Failure had a tempo faster than success.'
3. Satyajit should have revealed his predicament to his uncle.
4. The author's comment on crime and punishment.

Appreciation

1. How is Satyajit's financial crash introduced to the reader?
2. Comment on the way in which the story is narrated from Satyajit's perspective.
3. How has the author used the episode of the bank theft to comment on Satyajit's success in his career?
4. How do these lines capture the essence of the story:

   'Glory was all overlaid with dark shame. Glory was dead.'

   '… let him be wrapped a while in the lingering twilight splendour of departed glory'.

Language Work

1. Notice this description

   Tall, thin, near forty, he had sharp features, the hair receding on his temple in wide shiny patches. His eyes hated glare and he wore smart eye-glasses to shield them. His mouth, thinlipped, would tighten in response to a line that suggested strength of will but might have only been pride.

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Look at the padding of adjectives. Notice how physical features are related to mental qualities.

a. Pick out other such descriptions of people from the story.

b. Try writing out a description of a person you have observed closely.

2. Notice these expressions

'We **bask in your benediction.** Our **life-spark itself is held in your fist.**'

'This is her day. Let Beena alone **wash and wipe the reverent feet**. All her life she will remember **this honour befalling her on her auspicious day of her marriage.**'

- How do they capture the Indian idiom?
- Underline other such expressions.

3. Notice these fragments in para three of the lesson

a. The banking establishment of which he had attained control.

b. The amazing tempo of it all.

These are not complete sentences but serve to capture the character's train of thought. Such devices are often used in creative writing.

Suggested Reading

1. *An Astrologer's Day and other Stories* by R.K. Narayan.

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11074CH08

8 The Luncheon

William Somerset Maugham

☛ *Look for these expressions in the story and guess the meaning from the context*

devastating passion	caviare
complacency	vindictive
mortifying	ingratiating

I caught sight of her at the play and, in answer to her beckoning, I went over during the interval and sat down beside her. It was long since I had last seen her and if someone had not mentioned her name I hardly think I would have recognised her. She addressed me brightly.

'Well, it's many years since we first met. How time does fly! We're none of us getting any younger. Do you remember the first time I saw you? You asked me to luncheon.'

Did I remember?

It was twenty years ago and I was living in Paris. I had a tiny apartment in the Latin quarter overlooking a cemetery and I was earning barely enough money to keep the body and soul together. She had read a book of mine and had written to me about it. I answered, thanking her, and presently I received from her another letter saying that she was passing through Paris and would like to have a chat with me; but her time was limited and the only free moment she had was on the following Thursday; she was spending the morning at the Luxembourg and would I give her a little luncheon at Foyot's afterwards? Foyot's is a restaurant at which the French senators eat and it was so far beyond my means that I had never even thought of going there. But I was flattered and I was too young to have

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learned to say no to a woman. Few men, I may add, learn this until they are too old to make it of any consequence to a woman what they say. I had eighty francs (gold francs) to last me the rest of the month, and a modest luncheon should not cost more than fifteen. If I cut out coffee for the next two weeks I could manage well enough.

I answered that I would meet my friend—by correspondence—at Foyot's on Thursday at half-past twelve. She was not so young as I expected and in appearance imposing rather than attractive. She was, in fact, a woman of forty (a charming age, but not one that excites a sudden and devastating passion at first sight), and she gave me the impression of having more teeth, white and large and even, than were necessary for any practical purpose. She was talkative but since she seemed inclined to talk about me I was prepared to be an attentive listener.

I was startled when the bill of fare was brought for the prices were a great deal higher than I had anticipated. But she reassured me.

'I never eat anything for luncheon.' She said.

'Oh, don't say that!' I answered generously.

'I never eat more than one thing. I think people eat far too much nowadays. A little fish, perhaps. I wonder if they have any salmon.'

Well, it was early in the year for salmon and it was not on the bill of fare, but I asked the waiter if there was any. Yes, a beautiful salmon had just come in, it was the first they had had. I ordered it for my guest. The waiter asked her if she would have something while it was being cooked.

'No,' she answered, 'I never eat more than one thing. Unless you have a little caviare. I never mind caviare.'

My heart sank a little. I knew I could not afford caviare but I could not very well tell her that. I told the waiter by all means to bring caviare. For myself I chose the cheapest dish on the menu and that was a mutton chop.

'I think you are unwise to eat meat,' she said. 'I don't know how you can expect to work after eating heavy things like chops. I don't believe in overloading my stomach.'

Then came the question of drink.

'I never drink anything for luncheon,' she said.

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'Neither do I,' I answered promptly.

'Except white wine,' she proceeded as though I had not spoken.

'These French white wines are so light. They're wonderful for the digestion.'

'What would you like?' I asked, hospitable still, but not exactly effusive.

She gave me a bright and amicable flash of her white teeth.

'My doctor won't let me drink anything but Champagne.'

I fancy I turned a trifle pale. I ordered half a bottle. I mentioned casually that my doctor had absolutely forbidden me to drink Champagne.

'What are you going to drink, then?'

'Water.' She ate the caviare and she ate the salmon. She talked gaily of art and literature and music. But I wondered what the bill would come to. When my mutton chop arrived she took me quite seriously to task.

'I see that you're in the habit of eating a heavy luncheon. I'm sure it's a mistake. Why don't you follow my example and just eat one thing? I'm sure you'd feel ever so much better for it.'

'I am only going to eat one thing,' I said, as the waiter came again with the bill of fare.

She waved him aside with an airy gesture.

'No, no, I never eat anything for luncheon. Just a bite, I never want more than that, and I eat that more as an excuse for conversation than anything else. I couldn't possibly eat anything more—unless they had some of those giant asparagus. I should be sorry to leave Paris without having some of them.'

My heart sank. I had seen them in the shops and I knew that they were horribly expensive. My mouth had often watered at the sight of them.

'Madame wants to know if you have any of those giant asparagus,' I asked the waiter.

I tried with all my might to will him to say no. A happy smile spread over his broad, priest-like face and he assured me that they had some so large, so splendid, so tender, that it was a marvel.

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'I'm not in the least hungry,' my guest sighed, 'but if you insist I don't mind having some asparagus.'

I ordered them.

'Aren't you going to have any?'

'No, I never eat asparagus.'

'I know there are people who don't like them. The fact is, you ruin your palate by all the meat you eat.'

We waited for the asparagus to be cooked. Panic seized me: it was not a question now how much money I should have left over for the rest of the month but whether I had enough to pay the bill. It would be mortifying to find myself ten francs short and be obliged to borrow from my guest. I could not bring myself to do that. I knew exactly how much I had and if the bill came to me I made up my mind that I would put my hand in my pocket and with a dramatic cry start up and say it had been picked. Of course, it would be awkward if she had not money enough either to pay the bill; then the only thing would be to leave my watch and say I would come back and pay later.

The asparagus appeared. They were enormous, succulent, and appetizing. The smell of the melted butter tickled my nostrils as the nostrils of Johovah were tickled by the burned offerings of the virtuous Semites. I watched the abandoned woman thrust them down her throat in large voluptuous mouthfuls, and, in my polite way, I discoursed on the condition of the drama in the Balkans. At last she finished.

'Coffee,' I said...

'Yes, just an ice-cream and coffee,' she answered.

I was past caring now, so I ordered coffee for myself and ice-cream and coffee for her.

'You know, there's one thing I thoroughly believe in,' she said, as she ate the ice-cream. 'One should always get up from a meal feeling one could eat a little more.'

'Are you still hungry?' I asked faintly.

'Oh, no, I'm not hungry; you see, I don't eat luncheon. I have a cup of coffee in the morning and then dinner, but I never eat more than one thing for luncheon. I was speaking for you.'

'Oh, I see!'

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Then a terrible thing happened. While we were waiting for the coffee, the headwaiter, with an ingratiating smile on his false face, came up to us bearing a large basket full of huge peaches. They had the blush of an innocent girl; they had the rich tone of an Italian landscape. But surely peaches were not in season then? Lord knew what they cost. I knew too—a little later, for my guest, going on with her conversation, absentmindedly took one.

'You see, you've filled your stomach with a lot of meat' —my one miserable little chop— 'and you can't eat any more. But I've just had a snack and I shall enjoy a peach.'

The bill came and when I paid it I found that I had only enough for a quite inadequate tip. Her eyes rested for an instant on the three francs I left for the waiter and I knew that she thought me mean. But when I walked out of the restaurant I had the whole month before me and not a penny in my pocket.

'Follow my example,' she said as we shook hands, 'and never eat more than one thing for luncheon.'

'I'll do better than that,' I retorted. 'I'll eat nothing for dinner tonight.'

'Humorist', she cried gaily, jumping into a cab. 'You're quite a humorist!'

But I have had my revenge at last. I do not believe that I am a vindictive man, but when the immortal gods take a hand in the matter it is pardonable to observe the result with complacency. Today she weighs twenty-one stone.

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About the Author

William Somerset Maugham (1874–1965) is a distinguished British author. He was born in Paris and his childhood was spent in a French-speaking society. After the death of his father, he returned to England at the age of 10. He studied at Heidelberg and at St. Thomas's Hospital, London, and qualified as a doctor. But he preferred writing to practising medicine.

During his long career as a writer, Maugham produced a large number of novels, plays and short stories. Some of his best novels include *Of Human Bondage*, The *Moon and Sixpence* and *Cakes and Ale*.

Maugham has an amazing skill for revealing, with a few touches, a situation and the essentials of a character, and his stories are told with a lucidity and an economy of words which are the marks of a supreme craftsman.

Understanding the Text

1. Although the author was not a vindictive man he was very happy to see the twenty one stone lady who had impoverished him twenty years ago, and says he had finally had his revenge. What makes him says this?
2. There are quite a few places where the author uses the expressions 'my heart sank', 'panic seized' etc. What was the reason for this?
3. Locate instances of irony in the story.

Talking About the Text

Discuss in pairs or in small groups

1. People with foibles are often not conscious of them.
2. The author's attempts at keeping up his pretence of friendliness while he was mentally preoccupied with the expense of the luncheon.

Appreciation

1. The author is a humorist
   a. How does the story reflect his sense of humour?
   b. What makes his lady friend remark—'you are quite a humorist'?
   c. Give instances of the author's ability to laugh at himself.
2. How does the first person narrative help in heightening the literary effects of the story?

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Language Work

- Pick out the words and phrases in the text that indicate that the author was not financially well off.

Suggested Reading

1. 'The Phantom Luncheon' by Saki
2. 'The Ant and the Grasshopper' by W. Somerset Maugham.

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POETRY

INTRODUCTION

The word 'poetry' originates from a Greek word meaning 'to make'. A poet is thus a maker and the poem something that is made or created. No single definition of poetry is possible but some characteristic features of poetry may be mentioned. Poetry has a musical quality with rhythm, pitch, metre; and it may use figures of speech such as simile and metaphor.

While quite a few poems in this selection are in traditional forms, the unit also includes modern poems that are free from formal restrictions.

Examples of 'haiku' and 'limerick' have been included to introduce learners to these forms and to make students look to poetry for fun. Students need not be set questions or tested on this.

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1

The Peacock

Sujata Bhatt

His loud sharp call
seems to come from nowhere.
Then, a flash of turquoise
in the pipal tree
The slender neck arched away from you
as he descends,
and as he darts away, a glimpse
of the very end of his tail.

I was told
that you have to sit in the veranda
And read a book,
preferably one of your favourites
with great concentration..
The moment you begin to live
inside the book
A blue shadow will fall over you.
The wind will change direction,
The steady hum of bees
In the bushes nearby
will stop.
The cat will awaken and stretch.
Something has broken your attention;
And if you look up in time
You might see the peacock turning away as he gathers
his tail
To shut those dark glowing eyes,
Violet fringed with golden amber.
It is the tail that has to blink
For eyes that are always open.

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About the Poet

Sujata Bhatt (born 1956)) was educated in the USA and now lives in Germany. She won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for the Asia section for her collection of poems, *Brunizem* (1988), from which 'The Peacock' is taken. Two other books of poems by her are *Monkey Shadows* (1991) and *The Stinking Rose* (1994). She has also translated Gujarati poetry into English.

☛ *Notice these words in the poem and guess their meaning from the context*

turquoise	darts

Understanding the Poem

1. Comment on the lines that make you visualise the colourful image of the peacock.
2. What are the cues that signal the presence of the peacock in the vicinity?
3. How does the connection drawn between the tail and the eyes add to the descriptive detail of the poem?
4. How does the poem capture the elusive nature of the peacock?
5. The peacock is a colourful bird. How does the poem capture the various colours that its plumage displays?

Try this Out

1. In English the peacock is associated with pride. 'As proud as a peacock' is a commonly used simile. With what qualities is the peacock associated in the literature of your language?
2. The peacock is the national bird of India. Why do you think the peacock has been chosen?

Suggested Reading

1. 'The Bangle Sellers' by Sarojini Naidu.

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11074CH10

2

Let Me Not to the Marriage of True Minds

William Shakespeare

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no, it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error, and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

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About the Poet

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) was one of the greatest poets and dramatists of the English language. Born at Stratford-on-Avon, England, he went to London where his reputation as a dramatist and poet was established. His *Sonnets*, 154 in number, probably written between 1593 and 1598, were published in 1602. The above sonnet is sonnet number 116 in which we have a depiction of true love. His voluminous work includes 37 plays and two narrative poems.

☛ *The following two common words are used in a different sense in the poem. Guess what they mean*

bark	compass

Understanding the Poem

1. 'Constancy' is the theme of the poem. Indicate the words, phrases and images that suggest the theme.
2. Why do you think the poet has used so many 'negatives' to make his statement?
3. What does the line 'I never writ, nor no man ever loved' imply?
4. Love is presented as the subject or doer of actions in the poem. Why do you think the poet has used this form rather than involving human agents?
5. Explain the phrases
   a. his bending sickle's compass
   b. Time's fool

Try this Out

This poem is a Shakespearean sonnet.

1. What do you understand by a sonnet?
2. Look at some other sonnets and notice the variations in the structure of the sonnet that are possible.

Suggested Reading

1. "Shall I Compare Thee' by William Shakespeare.

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11074CH11

3

Coming

Philip Larkin

On longer evenings,
Light, chill and yellow,
Bathes the serene
Foreheads of houses.
A thrush sings,
Laurel-surrounded
In the deep bare garden,
Its fresh-peeled voice
Astonishing the brickwork.
It will be spring soon,
It will be spring soon—
And I, whose childhood
Is a forgotten boredom,
Feel like a child
Who comes on a scene
Of adult reconciling,
And can understand nothing
But the unusual laughter,
And starts to be happy.

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About the Poet

Philip Larkin (1922–1985) was born in Coventry, England. He is well-known as a leader of 'Movement' in English Poetry in the fifties. The principal works of Philip Larkin are *The North Ship, The Less Deceived, The Whitsun Weddings* and *High Windows.* His themes—love, change, disenchantment, the mystery, the inexplicableness of the poet's survival and death's inevitability—are universally liked by the readers. The above poem has been taken from the volume, *The Less Deceived,* which establishes a kinship with the environment.

Understanding the Poem

1. What does the bird in the poem announce? How is this related to the title, 'Coming'?
2. Why is the speaker's childhood described as 'a forgotten boredom'?
3. What causes the element of surprise when the child comes on the scene of 'adult reconciling'?
4. What two things are compared in the poem?
5. How do you respond to these lines?

   Light, chill and yellow,
   Bathes the serene
   Foreheads of houses

6. Comment on the use of the phrase 'fresh-peeled voice'.

Try this Out

1. The song of a bird is often the first sign of spring. Do you know the bird that signals the advent of *vasant* or spring in our country?
2. Do you know of other spring poems? How is this poem different from them?

Suggested Reading

1. 'Ambulances' by Philip Larkin.

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Haiku

Haiku is a Japanese three-line poem, usually having 17 syllables, and expresses a single thought. English imitations of the haiku are also very popular.

COBRA

His jewelled crown
and hypnotic sway enthral;
beware the lethal fangs.

NIGHT

Clouds appear
and bring to men a chance to rest
looking at the moon.

ALONE

Won't you come and see
loneliness? Just one leaf
from the Kiri tree.

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11074CH12

4 Telephone Conversation

Wole Soyinka

The price seemed reasonable, location
Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived
Off premises. Nothing remained
But self-confession. 'Madam,' I warned,
'I hate a wasted journey—I am African.'
Silence. Silenced transmission of
Pressurised good-breeding. Voice, when it came,
Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled
Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was, foully.
'HOW DARK ?'... I had not misheard... 'ARE YOU LIGHT
OR VERY DARK ?' Button B. Button A. Stench
Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.
Red booth. Red pillar-box. Red double-tiered
Omnibus squelching tar. It *was* real! Shamed
By ill-mannered silence, surrender
Pushed dumbfounded to beg simplification.
Considerate she was, varying the emphasis—
'ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?' Revelation came.
'You mean—like plain or milk chocolate?'
Her assent was clinical, crushing in its light
Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted,
I chose. 'West African sepia'—and as afterthought,
"down in my passport." Silence for spectroscopic
Flight of fancy, till truthfulness changed her accent
Hard on the mouthpiece. 'WHAT'S THAT?' conceding
'DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS.' 'Like brunette.'
'THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?' 'Not altogether.
Facially, I am brunette, but madam, you should see
The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
Are a peroxide blonde. Friction, caused—
Foolishly madam—by sitting down, has turned

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My bottom raven black—One moment madam!'—sensing
Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap
About my ears—'Madam,' I pleaded, 'wouldn't you rather
See for yourself ?'

About the Poet

Wole Soyinka (born 1934), is a famous Nigerian poet and playwright. He was educated at the Government College in Ibadan, Nigeria and, later, at Leeds University, England, where he took a degree in English. He taught in the London schools and also worked in the Royal Court Theatre. He returned to Nigeria when he was about twenty-five.

He has been one of the leading figures in Nigerian theatre, writing a number of successful plays and also leading a theatrical company.

He is the first African to receive the Nobel Prize for literature (1986). His writings are known for their humour and satire.

☛ *Notice these expressions in the poem and guess their meaning from the context*

rancid breath	squelching tar
spectroscopic flight of fancy	
rearing on the thunderclap	brunette
peroxide blonde	clinical assent
raven black	

Understanding the Poem

1. State the central issue in the poem.
2. There are intervals of silence in the interaction between the landlady and the prospective tenant. What are the reasons for this?
3. How is colour highlighted in the poem and why? List all the words in the poem that suggest colour.
4. Which are the lines in the poem that impressed you the most and why?

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5. You know what 'hide-and-seek' is. What would 'hide-and-speak' mean?
6. Certain words in the poem are in capital letters—why?
7. Why do you think that the poet has chosen the title 'Telephone Conversation'? If you were to suggest another title for the poem, what would it be?
8. The power of poetry lies in suggestion and understatement. Discuss this with reference to the poem.

Try this Out

1. Enact the conversation bits with your partner.
2. Attempt a description of
   a. the place from which the call was made
   b. the lady at the other end
   c. the speaker in the poem.
3. The poem evokes a mental picture of the scene. Draw a rough sketch to illustrate the episode.
4. The poem ends with 'Wouldn't you rather see for yourself?'. Imagine a personal encounter between the two people in the poem and write down the dialogue they might have had.

Suggested Reading

1. *Idanre and other Poems (1967)* by Wole Soyinka
2. *Poems from Prison (1969)* by Wole Soyinka.

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11074CH13

5

The World is too Much With Us

William Wordsworth

The World is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

The Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The Winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers,
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;

It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,

Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

Pagan: a person whose religious beliefs do not belong to any of the main religions of the world.

Proteus: a character in Greek mythology who had the gift of prophecy but who, when questioned, would assume different shapes to elude their grasp.

Triton: a sea-deity in Greek mythology, who is generally represented as blowing a shell, his body above the waist being that of a man, below it of a dolphin.

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About the Poet

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) spent most of his life in the Lake district of northern England, and the many hours that he spent wandering about the hills and woods led to the production of some of the finest poetry on nature. His work *Lyrical Ballads*, co-authored with Coleridge in 1798, is regarded as the beginning of the English Romantic Movement.

He selected subjects from nature and rustic life. He held the view that the language of poetry should be simple and natural.

Understanding the Poem

1. Why does the poet prefer to be a primitive Pagan rather than a member of civilised society?
2. What, according to the poet, are human beings out of tune with?

Try this Out

- Compare the organisation of this sonnet with that of the sonnet by William Shakespeare.

Suggested Reading

1. 'To the Cuckoo' by William Wordsworth
2. 'The Solitary Reaper' by William Wordsworth.

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11074CH14

6

Mother Tongue

Padma Sachdev

I approached a stem
Swinging on a reed
And asked him
To give me a quill.
Irritated, he said
I gave you one only the other day
A new one, what have you done with it?
Are you some sort of an accountant
With some *Shah*
Writing account books
Where you need a new pen
Every other day he asked.
No, I don't work for a *Shah*
I said, but for a *Shahni*, very kind,
Very well off
And I am not the only one
Working for her
She has many servants
Ever ready to do her bidding
That *Shahni* is my mother tongue
Dogri
Give me, a quill, quickly
She must be looking for me
The reed cut off its hand
Gave it to me and said
Take it
I too am her servant.

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About the Poet

Padma Sachdev (born 1940) writes in her mother tongue Dogri and in Hindi. She has received many awards for her poetry, including the Sahitya Academi Award she received at the age of thirty for her first collection of Dogri poems. The above poem, translated from the original Dogri, bemoans the deprivation of Dogri of its native script Sharade, that evolved from the original Brahmi around the time Dogri developed. Once widely used by the people of all religions in the valley, Sharade, for various reasons, came to be replaced by the Persian script. Presently both Persian and Devanagri (Hindi and Urdu) scripts are used for Dogri, a language listed in Schedule VIII of the Constitution of India.

Understanding the Poem

1. The quill is the central element in the poem—what does it symbolise?
2. You notice a sense of urgency in the poet's request—what is the reason for this?
3. How has the poet brought out her emotional attachment to her mother tongue?
4. Personification is a figure of speech that attributes human qualities to inanimate things and abstract ideas. How has it been used in this poem?

Try this Out

1. Talk to five people from different spheres of society around you and ask them the number of languages they know and use for various purposes. Try to gather information about their attitude to the different languages they know and use.
2. Dogri is a language spoken in parts of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. Its earliest mention is in Amir Khusro's list of Indian languages. It does not have a script of its own. It is written in either the Devnagari or the Persian script. Find out about other Indian languages that are spoken but do not have a script of their own.

Suggested Reading

1. 'Hindi' by Raghuvir Sahay.

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11074CH15

7

Hawk Roosting

Ted Hughes

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
Inaction, no falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees!
The air's buoyancy and the sub's ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth's face upward for my inspection.

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.
It took the whole of Creation
To produce my foot, my each feather:
Now I hold Creation in my foot.

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly—
I kill where I please because it is all mine.
There is no sophistry in my body:
My manners are tearing off heads.

The allotment of death.
For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living.
No arguments assert my right.

The sun is behind me.
Nothing has changed since I began,
My eye has permitted no change.
I am going to keep things like this.

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About the Poet

Ted Hughes (1930–1998) completed his education at Pembroke College, Cambridge. In 1956, he married the poet Sylvia Plath. He tried to make a living in America by teaching and writing. Finally, he returned to England.

The most remarkable quality of Hughes' poems is an intense and obsessive fascination with the world of birds and animals; and though essentially about birds, animals and fishes, his poems shock us with unusual phrases and violent images.

The above poem is in the form of a monologue.

☛ *Notice the use of the following phrases in the poem and guess what they mean in the context*

air's buoyancy	sophistry in my body

Understanding the Poem

1. Comment on the physical features of the hawk highlighted in the poem and their significance.
2. How does the poem emphasise the physical prowess of the hawk?
3. 'There is no sophistry in my body'—this statement expresses the brutal frankness of the hawk. Does the poet suggest something through this statement?
4. 'Now I hold Creation in my foot'—explain the centrality of this assertion in the poem. What makes the hawk's assertion of its invincibility so categorical?
5. Why is the poem entitled 'Hawk Roosting'?
6. Bring out the parallel suggested between the predatory instincts of the bird and human behaviour.

Try this Out

1. Consult a dictionary or an encyclopedia to differentiate between the following birds

eagle	hawk	kite	vulture

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2. To what aspects of human behaviour do the following adjectives apply

eagle-eyed	hawkish

Suggested Reading

1. 'The Lake' by Ted Hughes
2. 'Poem in October' by Dylan Thomas.

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8

11074CH16

For Elkana

Nissim Ezekiel

The warm April evening
tempts us to the breezes
sauntering across the lawn.
We drag our chairs down
the stone steps and plant them there.

Unevenly, to sit or rather sprawl
in silence till the words begin to come.
My wife, as is her way,
surveys the scene, comments
on a broken window-pane.

Suggests a thing or two
that every husband in the neighbourhood
knows exactly how to do
except of course the man she loves
who happened to be me.
Unwilling to dispute
the obvious fact

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that she is always right,
I turn towards the more
attractive view that opens up
behind my eyes and shuts her out.

Her voice crawls up and down the lawn,
our son, who is seven,
hears it—and it reminds him of something.
He stands before us,
his small legs well apart,
crescent-moon-like chin uplifted
eyes hard and cold
to speak his truth
in masterly determination:
Mummy, I want my dinner, now.
Wife and husband in unusual rapport
state one unspoken thought:
Children Must be Disciplined.
She looks at me. I look away.

The son is waiting. In another second
he will repeat himself.
Wife wags a finger.
Firmly delivers verdict: Wait.
In five minutes I'll serve you dinner.

No, says the little one,
not in five minutes, now.
I am hungry.
It occurs to me the boy is like his father.
I love him as I love myself.
Wait, darling, wait,
Mummy says, wait for five minutes
But, I am hungry now,
declaims the little bastard, in five minutes
I won't be hungry any more.

This argument appeals to me.
Such a logician deserves his dinner straightaway.

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My wife's delightful laughter
holds the three of us together.
We rise and go into the house.

About the Poet

Nissim Ezekiel (1924–2004) was born in Mumbai. He is today perhaps the best known Indian poet to have written in English. He had his education at Wilson College, Bombay and later at Birbeck College, London. A professor of American Literature at Bombay University, Ezekiel has written several poems and some plays. A proficient critic, Ezekiel lectured at a number of universities in the U.S.A. and the U.K.

Understanding the Poem

1. Comment on the subtlety with which the poet captures the general pattern of communication within a family.
2. Poetic effect is achieved in the poem through understatement and asides. Discuss this with examples.
3. How is the idyllic juxtaposed with the pedestrian in the poem?
4. Explain the undertones in the statement:
   'Wife and husband in unusual rapport
   State one unspoken thought':
5. Comment on the capitalisation of all the words in the line: 'Children Must be Disciplined'.
6. What makes the urgency of the child's demand seem logical?

Try this Out

1. Paraphrase the poem and notice the change in effect. Comment on the deft touch with which the poet transforms ordinary events into evocative poetry.

Suggested Reading

The Night of the Scorpion and Other Poems by Nissim Ezekiel.

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The Limerick

The limerick is a small five line poem, expressing a single thought. It is usually funny with a punch or joke in the last line. In fact, the limerick is to poetry what slapstick is to comedy.

The rhyme scheme is 'a a b b a' : the first and second lines rhyme with the fifth, while the third and fourth lines rhyme with each other.

One reason why the limerick is popular is that almost anyone can try his/her hand at it. May be you could too!

***

A novice was driving a car
When, down the road, his son said "Papa,
If you drive at this rate
We are bound to be late—
Drive faster!" He did, and they are.

***

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Earth's plan had a hopeful beginning
but man spoiled its chances by sinning.
We hope that the story,
Will end in Earth's glory
But at present the other side's winning!

***

There was once a man from Peru
Who dreamed he was eating his shoe
He woke up with a fright
In the middle of the night
And found that it was perfectly true!

***

There was a teacher named Ms Brass
Who was blessed with an unruly class
They slept and snored
And completely ignored
Theorems like Pythagoras.

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9

11074CH17

Refugee Blues

Wystan Hugh Auden

Say this city has ten million souls,
Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes:
Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no place for us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,
Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go there now.

In the village churchyard there grows an old yew,
Every spring it blossoms anew:
Old passports can't do that, my dear, old passports can't do that.

The consul banged the table and said:
'If you've got no passport you're officially dead';
But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;
Asked me politely to return next year;
But where shall we go today, my dear, but where shall we go today?

Came to a public meeting; the speaker got up and said:
'If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread';
He was talking of you and me, my dear, he was talking of you and me.

Thought I heard the thunder rumbling in the sky;
It was Hitler over Europe, saying: 'they must die';
We were in his mind, my dear, we were in his mind.

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Saw a poodle in a jacket fastened with a pin;
Saw a door opened and a cat let in:
But they weren't German Jews, my dear, but they weren't German Jews.

Went down the harbour and stood upon the quay,
Saw the fish swimming as if they were free:
Only ten feet away, my dear, only ten feet away.

Walked through a wood, saw the birds in the trees;
They had no politicians and sang at their ease:
They weren't the human race, my dear, they weren't the human race.

Dreamed I saw a building with a thousand floors,
A thousand windows and a thousand doors;
Not one of them was ours, my dear, not one of them was ours.

Went down to the station to catch the express,
Asked for two tickets to Happiness;
But every coach was full, my dear, every coach was full.

Stood on a great plain in the falling snow;
Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:
Looking for you and me, my dear, looking for you and me.

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About the Poet

Wystan Hugh Auden (1907–1973) was a student and later a Professor of Poetry at Oxford University. One of the most important poets of the century, he has published several collections of poems noted for their irony, compassion and wit.

Although a modern poem, 'Refugee Blues' uses the ballad form of narration.

Understanding the Poem

1. The title, 'Refugee Blues' encapsulates the theme of the poem. Comment.
2. What is the poetic technique used by the poet to convey the plaintive theme of the poem?
3. What do the references to the birds and animals made in the poem suggest?
4. How does the poet juxtapose the human condition with the behaviour of the political class?
5. How is the essence of the poem captured in the lines 'two tickets to Happiness'?

Try this Out

1. Here is a list of devices used in poetry. Elaborate on their use in this poem

   Refrain:
   Pathos:
   Irony:
   Sarcasm:

2. What does the colour 'blue' suggest in the poem? Make a list of other colours and the emotions and moods they carry.

Suggested Reading

1. 'Taller Today we Remember' by W.H. Auden
2. 'Our Hunting Fathers' by W.H. Auden.

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10

Felling of the Banyan Tree

Dilip Chitre

My father told the tenants to leave
Who lived on the houses surrounding our house on the hill
One by one the structures were demolished
Only our own house remained and the trees
Trees are sacred my grandmother used to say
Felling them is a crime but he massacred them all
The sheoga, the oudumber, the neem were all cut down
But the huge banyan tree stood like a problem
Whose roots lay deeper than all our lives
My father ordered it to be removed

The banyan tree was three times as tall as our house
Its trunk had a circumference of fifty feet
Its scraggy aerial roots fell to the ground
From thirty feet or more so first they cut the branches
Sawing them off for seven days and the heap was huge
Insects and birds began to leave the tree

And then they came to its massive trunk
Fifty men with axes chopped and chopped
The great tree revealed its rings of two hundred years
We watched in terror and fascination this slaughter
As a raw mythology revealed to us its age
Soon afterwards we left Baroda for Bombay
Where there are no trees except the one

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Which grows and seethes in one's dreams, its aerial roots
Looking for the ground to strike.

About the Poet

Dilip Chitre (1938–2009) was born in Baroda. He writes poetry both in Marathi and English. *Travelling in a Cage,* from which the poem selected here has been taken, was published in 1980. Apart from poetry, Chitre has also written short stories and critical essays. An Anthology of Marathi Poetry 1945–1965 is one of his most important works of translation. He sees poetry as an expression of the spirit. He lives and works in Mumbai.

☛ *Guess the meaning of the word* 'scraggy' *from the context.*

Understanding the Poem

1. Identify the lines that reveal the critical tone of the poet towards the felling of the tree.
2. Identify the words that help you understand the nature of the poet's father.
3. 'Trees are sacred my grandmother **used to say**'— what does the poet imply by this line?
4. 'No trees except the one which **grows and seethes** in one's dreams'— why is the phrase 'grows and seethes' used?
5. How does the banyan tree stand out as different from other trees? What details of the tree does the poet highlight in the poem?
6. What does the reference to raw mythology imply?
7. 'Whose roots lay deeper than our lives'— what aspect of human behaviour does this line reflect?
8. Comment on the contemporary concern that the poem echoes.

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Try this Out

1. Most of us have had this experience of seeing trees in our neighbourhood being mercilessly cut down in order to build a house or a public building or to widen a road. Describe any such experience you have had of the felling of a tree you were attached to, with reasons for your special attachment to the tree.
2. Find out the equivalents for *sheoga, oudumber* and *neem* in your language and English and the equivalent of *banyan* in your language.
3. The adjective 'scraggy' is used to describe 'roots' in the poem. Find out two other items which could be described as 'scraggy': scraggy.....
4. Use the following adjectives to describe suitable items

raw	aerial	sacred

Suggested Reading

1. 'Death of Grandmother' by Dilip Chitre.

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11074CH19

11

Ode to a Nightingale

John Keats

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness,
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

Lethe: in ancient Greek mythology, an imaginary river whose water, when drunk, was thought to make the dead forget their life on Earth.

Dryad: in stories, a female spirit that lives in a tree.

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***

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O, for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim.

Provencal: (pronounced Provensaal) of the district of Provence in France, known for its bards and its grapevines.

Hippocrene: a fountain in Mount Helicon associated with poetry; in the poem it refers to the wine that inspires poetic ability.

***

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

***

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Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Ruth: a woman in the Bible who left her own people to live with her mother-in-law, Naomi. After the death of her husband, marries Boaz and is the ancestor of King David.

***

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

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About the Poet

John Keats (1795–1821) was one of the greatest of the younger generation of 'English Romantic' poets. He started his career as an apprentice to a surgeon but

soon gave it up for poetry. His poetic career lasted for only four years but, during this short span, he evolved from an ordinary poet to an exceptionally mature poetic force. His poetry celebrates beauty, which he considered the ultimate truth. It is portrayed in extremely sensuous images that have been created through beautiful verbal pictures. The image of the nightingale's bower in the poem is an apt illustration of the poet's craft in this respect.

☛ *Look for these words and guess their meanings from the context*

hemlock	deep-delved
earth	forlorn
beechen green	deceiving elf
plaintive anthem	

UNDERSTANDING THE POEM

1. How does the nightingale's song plunge the poet into a state of ecstasy?
2. What are the unpleasant aspects of the human condition that the poet wants to escape from?
3. What quality of 'beauty' and 'love' does the poem highlight?
4. How does the poet bring out the immortality of the bird?
5. How is the poet tossed back from ecstasy into despair?
6. How does the poem bring out the elusive nature of happiness in human existence?

TRY THIS OUT

1. The poet has juxtaposed sets of opposites like **numbness pains, waking dream**. How does this contribute to the poetic effect? What is this figure of speech called? List other such pairs from poems that you have read.
2. The poet has evoked the image of wine—why has this image been chosen?
3. The senses of sound, sight and taste are evoked in the poem. Locate instances of these.

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4. The poet addresses the nightingale and talks to the bird throughout the poem. What is this kind of poem called?
5. Make a list of all the adjectives in the poem along with the nouns they describe. List the phrases that impressed you most in the poem.
6. Find out the other odes written by Keats and read them.
7. Find out the odes written by Shelley and read them.

Suggested Reading

1. The complete version of 'Ode to a Nightingale' by John Keats
2. 'Ode to the West Wind' by P.B. Shelley.

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11074CH20

12 Ajamil and the Tigers

Arun Kolatkar

The tiger people went to their king
and said, 'We're starving.
We've had nothing to eat,
not a bite,
for 15 days and 16 nights.
Ajamil has got
a new sheep dog.
He cramps our style
and won't let us get within a mile
of meat.'

'That's shocking,'
said the tiger king.
'Why didn't you come to see me before?
Make preparations for a banquet.
I'm gonna teach that sheep dog a lesson he'll never forget.'
'Hear hear,' said the tigers.
'Careful,' said the queen.
But he was already gone.
Alone
into the darkness before the dawn.

In an hour he was back,
the good king.
A black patch on his eye.
His tail in a sling.
And said, 'I've got it all planned
now that I know the lie of the land.
All of us will have to try.
We'll outnumber the son of a bitch.

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And this time there will be no hitch.
Because this time I shall be leading the attack.'

Quick as lightning
the sheep dog was.
He took them all in as prisoners of war,
the 50 tigers and the tiger king,
before they could get their paws
on a single sheep.
They never had a chance.
The dog was in 51 places all at once.
He strung them all out in a daisy chain
and flung them in front of his boss in one big heap.

'Nice dog you got there, Ajamil,'
said the tiger king.
Looking a little ill
and spiting out a tooth.
'But there's been a bit of a misunderstanding.
We could've wiped out your herd in one clean sweep.
But we were not trying to creep up on your sheep.
We feel that means are more important than ends.
We were coming to see you as friends.
And that's the truth.'

The sheep dog was the type
who had never told a lie in his life
He was built along simpler lines
and he was simply disgusted.
He kept on making frantic signs.
But Ajamil, the good shepherd
refused to meet his eyes
and pretended to believe every single word
of what the tiger king said.
And seemed to be taken in by all the lies.

Ajamil cut them loose
and asked them all to stay for dinner.
It was an offer the tigers couldn't refuse.
And after the lamb chops and the roast,

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when Ajamil proposed
they sign a long term friendship treaty,
all the tigers roared.
'We couldn't agree with you more.'
And swore they would be good friends all their lives
as they put down the forks and the knives.

Ajamil signed a pact
with the tiger people and sent them back.
Laden with gifts of sheep, leather jackets and balls of wool.
Ajamil wasn't a fool.
Like all good shepherds he knew
that even tigers have got to eat some time.
A good shepherd sees to it they do.
He is free to play a flute all day
as well fed tigers and fat sheep drink from the same pond
with a full stomach for a common bond.

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About the Poet

Arun Kolatkar (1932–2004) is a contemporary Indian poet. He was educated in Pune and earned a diploma in painting from the J.J. School of arts, Mumbai. He writes both in English and Marathi and has authored two books. The present poem is an excerpt from *Jejuri*— a long poem in thirty-one sections. A German translation of *Jejuri* by Gievanen Bandin was published in 1984.

Understanding the Poem

1. The poem has a literal level and a figurative level. Why has the poet chosen 'tigers' and 'sheep' to convey his message?
2. What facet of political life does the behaviour of Ajamil illustrate?
3. Why have the words, 'pretended' and 'seemed' been used in the lines:

   ...**pretended** to believe every single word
   of what the tiger king said.

And **seemed** to be taken in by all the lies.

How does the sense of these lines connect with the line 'Ajamil wasn't a fool'?

4. Why did Ajamil refuse to meet the sheepdog's eyes?

5. 'He is free to play a flute all day as well fed tigers and fat sheep drink from the same pond with a full stomach for a common bond.'

   What do the phrases 'play the flute all day' and 'a common bond' refer to?

6. The poem is a satire against the present political class. How effectively does it convey the anger and anguish of the common man trapped in the system?

Try this Out

Find out the difference between these literary forms
(*a*) fable (*b*) allegory (*c*) satire.

Suggested Reading

1. *Jejuri* by Arun Kolatkar.

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ESSAYS

INTRODUCTION

An essay is a short composition in prose that undertakes to discuss a matter, express a point of view, or persuade us to accept an idea on any subject. It is addressed to a general rather than a specialised audience; as a consequence, the essay discusses its subject in a non-technical fashion and often with a liberal use of anecdote, illustration and humour.

A useful distinction is that between the formal and informal essay. The formal essay is relatively impersonal, logically organised and filled with serious purpose. The informal essay is personal, written in a relaxed, often whimsical fashion, and tends to deal with everyday things.

Essays have been written since ancient times. The French writer, Montaigne, wrote short literary pieces which he called *Essaies*, meaning 'attempts'. Francis Bacon inaugurated the English use of the term in his own essays. The founding of literary periodicals and magazines gave great impetus to the writing of essays (earlier essays were published in books).

The essays in this unit provide a wide thematic range. *My Watch* is a humorous re-look at an instrument that most of us take for granted. *My Three Passions* focuses on the eternal concepts of love and pity. *Tribal Verse* makes one sensitively aware of the rich oral literatures of India. *Bridges*, an autobiographical excerpt, gives us a glimpse into the life of a kathak dancer and choreographer while *Patterns of Creativity* throws light on the creativity of poetry and creativity of science.

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1 My Watch

11074CH21

Mark Twain

☛ *Look for these expressions and words in the text and guess the meaning from the context*

bodings	human cabbage
vicious happiness	prised
brained him	

I

My beautiful new watch had run eighteen months without losing or gaining, and without breaking any part of its machinery or stopping. I had come to believe it infallible in its judgments about the time of day, and to consider its constitution and its anatomy imperishable. But, at last, one night, I let it run down. I grieved about it as if it were a recognised messenger and forerunner of calamity. But by and by I cheered up, set the watch by guess, and commanded my bodings and superstitions to depart.

Next day I stepped into the chief jeweller's to set it by the exact time, and the head of the establishment took it out of my hand and proceeded to set it for me. Then he said, 'she is four minutes slow—regulator wants pushing up'. I tried to stop him—tried to make him understand that the watch kept perfect time. But no; all this human cabbage could see was that the watch was four minutes slow and the regulator must be pushed up a little; and so, while I danced around him

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in anguish, and implored him to let the watch alone, he calmly and cruelly did the shameful deed. My watch began to gain. It gained faster and faster day by day. Within a week it sickened to a raging fever and its pulse went up to a hundred and fifty in the shade. At the end of two months it had left all the timepieces of the town far in the rear and was a fraction over thirteen days ahead of the almanac. It was away into November enjoying the snow, while the October leaves were still turning. It hurried up house rent, bills payable and such things in such a ruinous way that I could not abide it. I took it to the watchmaker to be regulated. He asked me if I had ever had it repaired. I said no, it had never needed any repairing. He looked a look of vicious happiness and eagerly pried the watch open, and then put a small dice-box into his eye and peered into its machinery. He said it wanted cleaning and oiling, besides regulating, and asked me to come in a week. After being cleaned and oiled, and regulated, my watch slowed down to that degree that it ticked all appointments I go to, missing my dinner, I gradually drifted back into yesterday, then the day before, then into last week and by and by the comprehension came upon me that, all solitary and alone, I was lingering alone in week before last and the world was out of sight. I seemed to detect in myself a sort of sneaking fellow-feeling for the mummy in the museum, and a desire to swap news with him. I went to a watchmaker again. He took the watch all to pieces while I waited and then said the barrel was 'swelled'. He said he could reduce it in three days. After this the watch averaged well, but nothing more. For a half day it would go like the very mischief, and keep up such a barking and wheezing and whooping and sneezing and snorting that I could not hear myself think for the disturbance: and as it held out there was not a watch in the land that stood any chance against it. But the rest of the day it would keep on slowing down and fooling along until all the clocks it had left behind caught up again. It would show a fair and square average, and no man could say it had done more or less than its duty.

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II

But a correct average is only a mild virtue in a watch and I took this instrument to another watchmaker. He said the king-bolt was broken. I said I was glad it was nothing more serious. To tell the plain truth, I had no idea what the king-bolt was, but I did not choose to appear ignorant to a stranger. He repaired the king-bolt but what the watch gained in one way it lost in another. It would run a while and then stop a while, and then run a while again, and so on, using its own discretion about the intervals. And every time it went off it kicked back like a musket. I padded my breast for a few days but, finally, took the watch to another watchmaker. He picked it all to pieces and turned the ruin over and over under his glass; and then he said there appeared to be fresh start. It did well now, except that always at ten minutes to ten the hands would shut together like a pair of scissors and from that time forth they would travel together. The oldest man in the world could not make head or tail of the time of day by such a watch, and so I went again to have the thing repaired. This person said that the crystal had got bent and the mainspring was not straight. He made these things all right and then my timepiece performed unexceptionably, save that now and then, after working along quietly for nearly eight hours, everything inside would let go all of a sudden and begin to buzz like a bee, and the hands would straightway begin to spin round and round so fast that their individuality was lost completely, and they simply seemed a delicate spider's web over the face of the watch. She would reel off the next twenty-four hours in six or seven minutes, and then stop with a bang. I went with a heavy heart to one more watchmaker, and looked on while he took her to pieces. Then I prepared to cross-question him rigidly, for this thing was getting serious. The watch had cost two hundred dollars originally, and I seemed to have paid out two or three thousand for repairs. While I waited and looked on, I presently recognised in this watchmaker an old acquaintance—a steam-boat engineer of other days and not a good engineer, either. He examined all the parts

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carefully, just as the other watchmakers had done, and then delivered his verdict with the same confidence of manner.

He said:

'She makes too much steam— you want to hang the monkey-wrench on the safety-valve!' I brained him on the spot and had him buried at my own expense. My uncle William (now deceased, alas!) used to say that a good horse was a good horse until it had run away once, and that a good watch was a good watch until the repairers got a chance at it. And he used to wonder what became of all the unsuccessful tinkers, and gunsmiths, and shoe-makers, and engineers, and blacksmiths; but nobody could ever tell him.

About the Author

Samuel L. Clemens (1835–1910), who used the pseudonym Mark Twain, was an American humorist, short story writer and novelist.

Brought up in the small town of Hannibal, Missouri, Mark Twain had less than 10 years of schooling. He worked as a printer's apprentice, a steamboat pilot, a prospector and a journalist. All this gave him varied experiences and a wide knowledge of humanity.

In the *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, he drew on his own childhood; *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which was planned merely as a sequel, went on to become a masterpiece, the story being narrated through an uneducated boy.

Understanding the Text

1. What was the importance of the watch to the author?
2. What were the attempts made by the author to get his watch repaired?
3. Why did the author finally give up on his watch?
4. What was Uncle Williams' comment on the 'tinkerers' of the world?

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5. Explain these lines
   a. 'I seemd to detect in myself a sort of sneaking fellow-feeling for the mummy in the museum, and a desire to swap news with him.'
   b. 'Within a week it sickened to a raging fever and its pulse went up to a hundred and fifty in the shade.'
   c. 'She makes too much steam—you want to hang the monkey wrench on the safety valve!'

Talking About the Text

Discuss in pairs or groups of four

1. Replacing old machines with new is better than getting them repaired.
2. It is difficult to part with personal items like a watch which have a sentimental value attached to them.

Appreciation

1. How is humour employed to comment on the pains that the author took to get his watch set right?
2. 'The author's treatment of the subject matter makes the readers identify themselves with the experience.' Comment on this statement.
3. Identify some of the improbable images the author has used to effect greater humour.

Language Work

Make a list of the expressions that imbue the watch with human attributes.

Suggested Reading

1. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain
2. *The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories* by Mark Twain.

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2 My Three Passions

11074CH22

Bertrand Russell

☛ *From the context of the passage, guess the meaning of the words and phrases in the box*

wayward course	ocean of anguish	verge of despair
mystic miniature	unfathomable	abyss
apprehend	reverberate	

Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair.

I have sought love, first, because it brings ecstasy—ecstasy so great that I would often have sacrificed all the rest of life for a few hours of this joy. I have sought it, next, because it relieves loneliness—that terrible loneliness in which one shivering consciousness looks over the rim of the world into the cold unfathomable lifeless abyss. I have sought it, finally, because in the union of love, I have seen, in a mystic miniature, the prefiguring vision of the heaven that saints and poets have imagined. This is what I sought and, though it might seem too good for human life, this is what at least I have found.

With equal passion, I have sought knowledge. I have wished to understand the hearts of men. I have wished to know why the stars shine. And I have tried to apprehend the Pythagorean power by which number holds sway over the flux. A little of this, but not much, I have achieved.

Love and knowledge, so far as they were possible, led upward toward the heavens. But always pity brought me back to earth. Echoes of cries of pain reverberate in my

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heart. Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people a hated burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty and pain make a mockery of what human life should be. I long to alleviate the evil, but I cannot, and I too suffer.

This has been my life. I have found it worth living, and would gladly live it again if the chance were offered to me.

About the Author

Bertrand Russell (1872–1969), the British philosopher and mathematician, has written numerous popular works on philosophy, politics and education. He took a major part in the twentieth century revival of logic and made continued effort to identify the methods of philosophy with those of the sciences. He received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1950. The above passage is an extract from Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography.*

Understanding the Text

1. Why does Russell call the three passions 'simple'?
2. Why has he compared the three passions to great winds?
3. What, according to Russell, is the importance of love in life?
4. How does Russell's definition of knowledge differ from what is commonly understood by the term?
5. Why is the quality of pity earth-bound while the other two passions are elevating?
6. How have the three passions contributed to the quality of Russell's life?

☛ *Read the summary of Martin Luther's King's distinction between three kinds of love given below.*

King's sixth point was central to the method of non-violent resistance. He believed that the importance of non-violence rested in the fact that it prevented physical violence and the 'internal violence of spirit'. Bitterness and hate were absent from the resister's mind, and replaced

...cont.

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with love. However, the kind of love King was talking about was not the affectionate type but, instead, the type that meant 'understanding, redeeming good will for all people'. He further explained that in the Greek New Testament, there were three words for love and each had a different meaning. *Eros* was romantic love and *philla* was a reciprocal love. Neither of these two types of love were the kind that King advanced. *Agape,* which was not a passive love, was the kind of redemptive love he referred to. According to King, "It is an overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless and creative. It is not set in motion by any quality or function of its object. It is the love of God operating in the human heart."

Additionally, it was a love that was disinterested. The act of loving was not for one's own good but for the good of another. It did not distinguish between worthy and unworthy people or friends and enemies. Furthermore, it was love that fulfilled the need of another person. A person was in greatest need of love when a sinner.

King also believed that *agape* sought to preserve and create community. As a result, no distance was too far to travel in the attempt to restore community. *Agape* was,

> ...a willingness to forgive, not seven times, but seventy times to restore community. The cross is the eternal expression of the length to which God will go in order to restore broken community. The resurrection is a symbol of God's triumph over all the forces that seek to block community. The Holy Spirit is the continuing community creating reality that moves through history. He who works against community is working against the whole of creation.

Thus, hateful responses promote a broken community and instead one must respond to hate with love in order to avoid becoming depersonalised and to fix a broken community.

Lastly, *agape* means that every aspect of life is interrelated. All human beings are related to one another and by harming another they harm themselves.

Martin Luther King was a man who believed that the power of love could be the most effective weapon against the social ills of society. He promoted resistance that was nonviolent and, in the end, it proved to be the most successful method against an unjust system of segregation.

- How does Russell's concept of love and pity tie up with King's concepts of *agape*?

Suggested Reading

1. 'Ideas that have Helped Mankind' by Bertrand Russell
2. 'Ideas that have Harmed Mankind' by Bertrand Russell.

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3 Patterns of Creativity

11074CH23

S. Chandrasekhar

☛ *Look for these expressions and guess the meaning from the context*

cold philosophy		mutually sustaining endeavours
picaresque tale	cenotaph	atrophy
looked askance		prophetic discernment
apposite	hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration	
interlunations of life		

...**B**ut I must return to the question: why is there a difference in the patterns of creativity among the practitioners in the arts and the practitioners in the sciences? 1 shall not attempt to answer this question directly; but I shall make an assortment of remarks which may bear on the answer.

First, I should like to consider how scientists and poets view one another. When one thinks of the attitude of poets to science, one almost always thinks of Wordsworth and Keats and their off-quoted lines

A fingering slave,
One that would peep and botanises
Upon his mother's grave?

A reasoning self-suffering thing.
An intellectual All-in-All!

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings:
Our meddling intellect
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things:
We murder to dissect.

(Wordsworth)

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Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings.

(Keats)

These lines, perhaps, find an echo in a statement of Lowes Dickinson, "When Science arrives, it expels Literature".

It is to be expected that one should find scientists countering these views. Thus, Peter Medawar counters Lowes Dickinson by

> The case I shall find evidence for is that when literature arrives, it expels science... The way things are at present, it is simply no good pretending that science and literature represent complementary and mutually sustaining endeavours to reach a common goal. On the contrary, where they might be expected to cooperate they compete.

It would not seem to me that one can go very far in these matters by pointing accusing fingers at one another. So, let me only say that the attitudes of Wordsworth and Keats are by no means typical. A scientist should rather consider the attitude of Shelley. Shelley is a scientist's poet. It is not an accident that the most discriminating literary criticism of Shelley's thought and work is by a distinguished scientist, Desmond King-Hele. As King-Hele has pointed out, "Shelley's attitude to science emphasises the surprising modern climate of thoughts in which he chose to live and Shelley describes the mechanisms of nature with a precision and a wealth of detail unparalleled in English poetry". And here is A.N. Whitehead's testimony

> Shelley's attitude to Science was at the opposite pole to that of Wordsworth. He loved it, and is never tired of expressing in poetry the thoughts which it suggests. It symbolises to him joy, and peace, and illumination...

I should like to read two examples from Shelley's poetry which support what has been said about him. The first example is from his *Cloud* which 'fuses together a creative myth, a scientific monograph, and a gay picaresque tale of cloud adventure'

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I am the daughter of Earth and Water,
And the nursling of the Sky:
I pass through the pores of the ocean and the shores:
I change, but I cannot die.
For after the rain when never a stain
The pavilion of Heaven is bare,
And the winds and sunbeams with their convex gleams
Build up the blue dome of air,
I silently laugh at my own cenotaph,
And out of the caverns of rain,
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,
I arise and unbuild it again.

The second example is from *Prometheus Unbound*, which has been described by Herbert Read as "the greatest expression ever given to humanity's desire for intellectual light and spiritual liberty"

The lightning is his slave, heaven's utmost deep
Gives up her stars, and like a flock of sheep
They pass before his eye, are numbered, and roll on!
The tempest is his steed, he strides the air;
And the abyss shouts from her depth laid bare,
Heaven, hast thou secrets? Man unveils me: I have none.

Let me turn to a slightly different aspect of the matter. What are we to make of the following confession of Charles Darwin?

> Up to the age of thirty, or beyond it, poetry of many kinds, such as the works of Milton, Gray, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley gave me great pleasure; and even as a school boy I took intense delight in Shakespeare, especially historical plays... I have also said that formerly pictures gave me considerable, and music very great, delight. But now, for many years, I cannot endure to read a line of poetry; I have tried lately to read Shakespeare and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have almost lost my taste for pictures or music... My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive.

Or consider this: Faraday discovered the laws of electromagnetic induction and his discoveries led him to

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formulate concepts such as 'lines of force' and 'fields of force' which were foreign to the then prevailing modes of thought. They were, in fact, looked askance by many of his contemporaries. But of Faraday's ideas, Maxwell wrote with prophetic discernment

> The way in which Faraday made use of his idea of the lines of force in coordinating the phenomenon of electro-magnetic induction shows him to have been, in reality, a mathematician of a very high order—one from whom the mathematicians of the future may derive valuable and fertile methods. We are probably ignorant even of the name of the science which will be developed out of the materials we are now collecting, when the great philosopher next after Faraday makes his appearance.

And yet when Gladstone, then the Chancellor of the Exchequer, interrupted Faraday in his description of his work on electricity by the impatient inquiry, "But after all, what use is it?" Faraday's response was, "Why, Sir, there is every probability that you will soon be able to tax it". And Faraday's response has always been quoted most approvingly.

It seems to me that to Darwin's confession and to Faraday's response, what Shelley has said about the cultivation of the sciences in his *Defence of Poetry* is apposite

> The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave.

Lest you think that Shelley is not sensitive to the role of technology in moden society, let me quote what he has said in that connection

> Undoubtedly the promoters of utility, in this limited sense, have their appointed office in society. They follow the footstep of poets, and copy the sketches of their creations into the book of common life. They make space and give time.

Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*, from which I have just quoted, is one of the most moving documents in all of English literature. W.B. Yeats called it "the profoundest

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essay on the foundation of poetry in the English language". The essay should be read in its entirety; but allow me to read a selection

> Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and the best minds. Poetry, thus, makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world; it arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life,..
>
> Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. It is, at the same time, the root and blossom of all other systems of thought.
>
> Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors or the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

On reading Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*, the question insistently occurs why there is no similar *A Defence of Science* written by a scientist of equal endowment. Perhaps in raising the question I have, in part, suggested an answer to the one I have repeatedly asked during the lecture.

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About the Author

S. Chandrasekhar (1910-1995) was a distinguished astrophysicist and Nobel Laureate. He was a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics at the University of Chicago. He received many awards and wrote several books. *Truth and Beauty* from which 'Patterns of Creativity' has been taken is a collection of seven lectures addressing aesthetics and motivation in the pursuit of science and contemplates patterns of scientific

creativity. The extract is from The Nora and Edward Byerson Lecture titled 'Shakespeare, Newton and Beethoven, or Patterns of Creativity'.

Understanding the Text

1. How does Shelley's attitude to science differ from that of Wordsworth and Keats?
2. 'It is not an accident that the most discriminating literary criticism of Shelley's thought and work is by a distinguished scientist, Desmond King-Hele.' How does this statement bring out the meeting point of poetry and science?
3. What do you infer from Darwin's comment on his indifference to literature as he advanced in years?
4. How do the patterns of creativity displayed by scientists differ from those displayed by poets?
5. What is the central argument of the speaker?

Talking About the Text

Discuss in small groups

1. 'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world'.
2. Poetry and science are incompatible.
3. 'On reading Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry,* the question insistently occurs why there is no similar *A Defence of Science* written by a scientist of equal endowment.'

Appreciation

1. How does the 'assortment of remarks' compiled by the author give us an understanding of the ways of science and poetry?
2. Considering that this is an excerpt from a lecture, how does the commentary provided by the speaker string the arguments together?
3. The *Cloud* 'fuses together a creative myth, a scientific monograph, and a gay picaresque tale of cloud adventure'—explain.

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Language Work

1. How do the words in bold, in the lines below, illustrate the poet's ability to convey criticism cryptically?

   Our **meddling intellect**
   Misshapes the beauteous forms of things:
   We **murder to dissect.**

2. Explain the contradiction in the similies, 'Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb'.
3. Explain the metaphor in the line: 'Poets are ... the mirrors of gigantic shadows that futurity casts on the present'.

Suggested Reading

'Literature and Science' by Matthew Arnold.

☞ *Read and enjoy the excerpts from an interview given by S.Chandrasekhar to* Deccan Herald *(23 January, 1994 issue).*

QUESTION: You came to America in 1936. Do you think you would have achieved what you did had you stayed back in India?

CHANDRASEKHAR: In a narrow sense, the answer is NO. There were better facilities for work here. I was also disconcerted with science politics in India. I was very sensitive and I desired the mental peace to do science the way I wanted.

Secondly, how can one evaluate scientific achievement? It is not a personal accomplishment. I had many students and collaborators. Science has to be an integrated effort. Otherwise, it would be too narrow.

Q: Who was your earliest mentor? And who influenced you most in your career?

A: I had no mentor. And nobody influenced me. I wrote my thesis on my own. I have always been alone. This is not criticism. It is the character of my work.

Q: Do you recall your mother and her attitudes which may have shaped yours?

A: Yes, I recall a particular incident which revealed my mother's extraordinary awareness. I was hardly ten years old, when she woke me up one morning and said, "Do you know Ramanujam is dead? It has come in the newspaper."

The very fact that she realised that Ramanujam's death was an important event showed her enlightenment in these matters. Her attitudes did influence me a great deal.

..cont.

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Q: Has your wife been a great support to you in your scientific career?

A: I have mentioned Lalitha in my book, *Truth and Beauty*. My biographer, Kameswar Wali, has also written a whole chapter on my wife. [Suddenly, with a smile] Do you know the American press called that the best chapter?

Q: Have you, at any point of time, regretted your decision to leave the country of your birth?

A: There is no point in regretting or being happy over decisions you have made. I think it's irrational to regret the past anyway. You must reconcile yourself to the life you have chosen and lived.

Q: Do you enjoy teaching?

A: I always integrated teaching with research. They support each other.

Q: What is it that makes Indians achieve more in this country (America) than in India? Do you think it could be the academic climate?

A: I wouldn't judge achievement by awards. The quality of science in India is good too. But I remember in the 1930s the great scientists of that country were in the universities. But today it is not so. And, that is a loss.

Q: Has your personal life been complete and happy?

A: That you should ask Lalitha—may be I could have given more. [Pause] I don't believe that a scientist—a true scientist—can ever have a complete personal life. [Pause again] I sometimes wonder whether all that I did and accomplished in my lifetime—was it really worth it?

. . .

Kameswar Wali later interpreted this comment as: "When Chandra asks—Was it worth it? — he is not being negative. It is just an awareness, another dimension of realisation which dawns as one get older.

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4 Tribal Verse

11074CH24

G.N. Devy

☛ *Look for these expressions in the text and guess the meaning from the context*

marginalisation of communities	accelerated pace
canonized written texts	rich repository of folk songs
tribal vision of life	cohesive and organically unified
itinerant street singers	

Introduction

The roots of India's literary traditions can be traced to the rich oral literatures of the tribes/adivasis. Usually in the form of songs or chanting, these verses are expressions of the close contact between the world of nature and the world of tribal existence. They have been orally transmitted from generation to generation and have survived for several ages. However, a large number of these are already lost due to the very fact of their orality. The forces of urbanisation, print culture and commerce have resulted in not just the marginalisation of these communities but also of their languages and literary cultures. Though some attempts have been made for the collection and conservation of tribal languages and their literatures, without more concerted efforts at an acelerated pace, we are in danger of losing an invaluable part of our history and rich literary heritage.

This section is a small attempt to familiarise students with some aspects of the enormous wealth of oral tribal literature. It begins with an extract from an essay by G.N. Devy in which he discusses the need to create a space for the study of tribal literature within the framework of canonized written texts. What he argues for is the need for a

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new method to identify and read literature in which orality is not dismissed as casual utterances in different dialects.

This is followed by two songs—one sung on the occasion of childbirth by the Munda tribals and the other on the occasion of death by the Kondh tribals. The third verse is a chanting in the ritualistic religious language of the Adi tribe, not the same as their language of conversation. Even though this is merely a small representation of a treasure of tribal/adivasi songs, it indicates the immense diversity that exists amongst tribal groups. Inevitably influenced by their very specific historical, cultural and geographical locations, tribal societies continue to retain and reproduce their distinctive traditions which usually find expression through their different languages. However, it is equally true that though possessing their very specific languages, most tribal societies such as Munda, Kondh, Adi and Bondo are bilingual. Moreover, while tribal groups like the Santhal become important subjects in dominant literary streams such as Bangla literature, there is a fairly well developed Santhali literature too. Besides this, tribes like Santhal and Munda have also played a prominent role in the socio-political movements of their regions. [Birsa Munda (1874–1901) spent his whole life fighting against colonialism and the exploitation of labourers]. The Santhals have emerged as a prominent group at the regional and state levels through their participation in the Jharkhand Movement.

The three selected songs give us a small glimpse into the rich repository of folk songs that is an expression of the tribal vision of life. Their close connection with nature is evident from their belief in the interdependence between human beings and nature. Nature for them is living and responsive to human existence and human actions, demanding respect essential for any kind of coexistence.

The songs exist originally in the native languages of the tribals and are sung or chanted. The effort to bring them to students in English naturally involves some loss of the original flavour and spirit but that is a problem of all translation and constant attempts need to be made to minimise this loss. But for some conscious effort being

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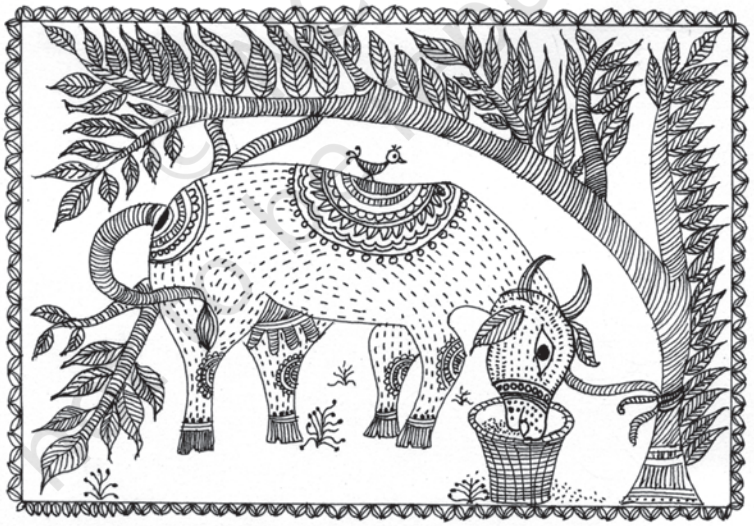
made to first preserve these songs, these pieces of literature would have been lost to us completely. However limitedly, it is only through translation that we are able to even access these works.

'Introduction' to Painted Words

...Most tribal communities in India are culturally similar to tribal communities elsewhere in the world. They live in groups that are cohesive and organically unified. They show very little interest in accumulating wealth or in using labour as a device to gather interest and capital. They accept a world-view in which nature, human beings and God are intimately linked and they believe in the human ability to spell and interpret truth. They live more by intution than reason, they consider the space around them more sacred than secular, and their sense of time is personal rather than objective. The world of the tribal imagination, therefore, is radically different from that of modern Indian society.



Once a society accepts a secular mode of creativity within which the creator replaces God, imaginative transactions assume a self-conscious form. The tribal imagination, on the other hand, is still, to a large extent,

dreamlike and hallucinatory. It admits fusion between various planes of existence and levels of time in a natural way. In tribal stories, oceans fly in the sky as birds, mountains swim in the water as fish, animals speak as humans and stars grow like plants. Spatial order and temporal sequence do not restrict the narrative. This is not to say that tribal creations have no conventions or rules but simply that they admit the principle of association between emotion and the narrative motif. Thus stars, seas, mountains, trees, men and animals, can be angry, sad or happy.

It might be said that tribal artists work more on the basis of their racial and sensory memory than on the basis of a cultivated imagination. In order to understand this distinction, we must understand the difference between imagination and memory. In the animate world, consciousness meets two immediate material realities: space and time. We put meaning into space by perceiving it in terms of images. The image making faculty is a genetic gift to the human mind—this power of imagination helps us understand the space that envelops us. In the case of time, we make connections with the help of memory; one remembers being the same person as one was yesterday.

The tribal mind has a more acute sense of time than sense of space. Somewhere along the history of human civilization, tribal communities seem to have realised that domination over territorial space was not their lot. Thus, they seem to have turned almost obsessively to gaining domination over time. This urge is substantiated in their ritual of conversing with their dead ancestors: year after year, tribals in many parts of India worship terracotta, or carved-wood objects, representing their ancestors, aspiring to enter a trance in which they can converse with the dead. Over the centuries, an amazingly sharp memory has helped tribals classify material and natural objects into a highly complex system of knowledge. The importance of memory in tribal systems of knowledge has not yet been sufficiently recognised but the aesthetic proportions of the houses that tribals build, the objects they make and the rituals they perform fascinate the curious onlooker. It can be hard to understand how, without any institutional training or

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tutoring, tribals are able to dance, sing, craft, build and speak so well ...

A vast number of Indian languages have yet remained only spoken, with the result that literary compositions in these languages are not considered 'literature'. They are a feast for the folklorist, anthropologist and linguist but, to a literary critic, they generally mean nothing. Similarly, several nomadic Indian communities are broken up and spread over long distances but survive as communities because they are bound by their oral epics. The wealth and variety of these works is so enormous that one discovers their neglect with a sense of pure shame. Some of the songs and stories I heard from itinerant street singers in my childhood are no longer available anywhere. For some years now I have been collecting songs and stories that circulate in India's tribal languages, and I am continually overwhelmed by their number and their profound influence on the tribal communities.

The result is that I, for one, can no longer think of literature as something written. Of course I do not dispute the claim of written compositions and texts to the status of literature; but surely it is time we realise that unless we modify the established notion of literature as something written, we will silently witness the decline of various Indian oral traditions. That literature is a lot more than writing is a reminder necessary for our times.

One of the main characteristics of tribal arts is their distinct manner of constructing space and imagery, which might be described as 'hallucinatory'. In both oral and visual forms of representation, tribal artists seem to interpret verbal or pictorial space as demarcated by an extremely flexible 'frame'. The boundaries between art and non-art become almost invisible. A tribal epic can begin its narration from a trivial everyday event; tribal paintings merge with living space as if the two were one and the same. And within the narrative itself, or within the painted imagery, there is no deliberate attempt to follow a sequence. The episodes retold and the images created take on the apparently chaotic shapes of dreams. In a tribal *Ramayan*, an episode from the *Mahabharat* makes a sudden and

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surprising appearance; tribal paintings contain a curious mixture of traditional and modern imagery. In a way, the syntax of language and the grammar of painting are the same, as if literature were painted words and painting were a song of images.

Yet it is not safe to assume that the tribal arts do not employ any ordering principles. On the contrary, the ordering principles are very strict. The most important among these is convention. Though the casual spectator may not notice, every tribal performance and creation has, at its back, another such performance or creation belonging to a previous occasion. The creativity of the tribal artist lies in adhering to the past while, at the same time, slightly subverting it. The subversions are more playful than ironic.

Indeed, playfulness is the soul of tribal arts. Though oral and pictorial tribal art creations are intimately related to rituals—the sacred can never be left out—the tribal arts rarely assume a serious or pretentious tone. The artist rarely plays the role of the Creator. Listening to tribal epics can be great fun as even the heroes are not spared the occasional shock of the artist's humour. One reason for this unique mixture of the sacred and the ordinary may be that tribal works of art are not created specifically for sale. Artists do expect a certain amount of patronage from the community, like artists in any other context; but, since those performing rituals are very often artists themselves, there is no element of competition in the patron-artist relationship. The tribal arts are, therefore, relaxed, never tense... One question invariably asked about the tribal arts is whether they are static—frozen in tradition— or dynamic. A general misconception is that the orally transmitted arts are entirely tradition-bound, with little scope for individual experimentation beyond the small freedom to distort the previously created text. This misconception arises from the habit of seeing art only with reference to the text but the tribal arts involve not just text but performance and audience reception. Experimentation in the tribal arts can be understood only when they are approached as performing arts.

Non-tribals usually fail to notice that all of India's tribal communities are basically bilingual. All bilingual

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communities have an innate capacity to assimilate outside influences and, in this case, a highly evolved mechanism for responding to the non-tribal world. The tribal oral stories and songs employ bilingualism in such a complex manner that a linguist who is not alert to this complexity is in danger of dismissing the tribal languages altogether as dialects of India's major tongues...

The language into which the works have been translated, English, carries massive colonial baggage. When the works of contemporary Indian writers—who inherit a multilingual tradition several thousand years old—were classified as 'new literature', Western academics had no idea how comical this classification looked to the literary community in India. Hence it is neccessary to assert that the literature of the adivasis is not a new 'movement' or a fresh 'trend' in the field of literature; most people have simply been unaware of its existence and that is not the fault of the tribals themselves. What might be new is the present attempt to see imaginative expression in tribal language not as 'folklore' but as literature and to hear tribal speech not as a dialect but as a language. This attitude may be somewhat unconventional but only until we recall that scripts themselves are relatively new, and that the printing of literary text goes no further back than a few centuries—in comparison with creative experiments with the human ability to produce speech in such a way that it

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transcends time. In fact, every written piece of literature contains substantial layers of orality. This is particularly true for poetry and drama but, even in prose fiction, the elements of orality need to be significant if the work is to be effective.

1. A Munda Song: Song of Birth and Death

My mother, the sun rose
A son was born.
My mother, the moon rose
A daughter was born.
A son was born
The cowshed was depleted;
A daughter was born
The cowshed filled up.
(Translated from the original Mundari)

Note on the Munda Tribe

The Munda tribals live in parts of Jharkhand, West Bengal, Assam, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. They are also known as *Horohon* or *Mura*, meaning headman of a village. One of the most studied tribal communities of India, they also have an encyclopaedia on them, *Encyclopaedia Mundarica* (16 Volumes) by Reverend John Baptist Hoffman (1857–1928) and other Jesuit scholars.

The Munda are probably the first of the adivasis to resist colonialism and they revolted repeatedly over agrarian issues. The Tamar insurrection of 1819–20 protested against the break-up of their agrarian system. In their quest to establish Munda Raj and reform their society to enable it to cope with the challenges of time, they organised the famous millennial movement under Birsa Munda (1874–1901) where their leaders used 'both Hindu and Christian idioms to create a Munda ideology and worldview'. However, the uprising was quelled by the British.

Note on the Munda Song

Many ceremonies and rituals of the Munda are associated with birth, death and marriage. Living in close

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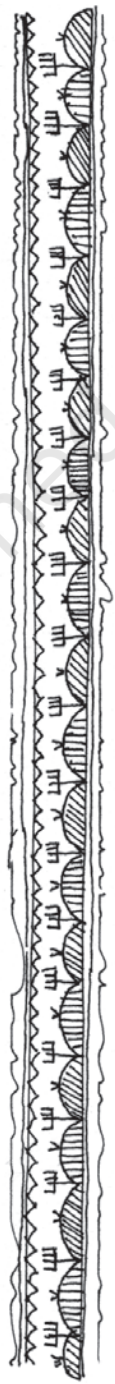
harmony with nature, their lives are synchronised with the changing rhythms of nature, the seasons, the rising and setting of the sun and so on, and not by clock time. The selected Munda song is sung to rhythmic folk tunes at the birth of a son or daughter and invariably communicates their close association with nature. Cattle set off to the pastures in the morning and return to their sheds at sundown. The birth of a daughter is associated with a cowshed full of cows and that of the son with its depletion. Clearly the daughter is considered to be a more precious asset than the son. This is probably because, in Munda society, the women have a dominant role to play in the various economic, social and ritual activities.



2. A KONDH SONG

This we offer to you.
We can,
Because we are still alive;
If not,
How could we offer at all,
And what ?
We give a small baby fowl.
Take this and go away
Whichever way you came.
Go back, return.
Don't inflict pain on us
After your departure.
(Translated from the original Kondh)

A note on the Kondh Tribe

The term 'Kondh' is most probably derived from the Dravidian word, *konda*, meaning hill. Divided into several segments and distributed over the districts of Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Orissa, these hill people speak the Kondh language though

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most of them are bilingual and so conversant with the major language of the state to which they belong.

The Kondh religion is a mixture of the traditional faith of the adivasis and Hinduism. They do not have any dowry system but they do fix a bride price that the groom pays to the bride either in cash or in kind.

A Note on the Kondh Song

The Kondhs observe a number of rituals in connection with birth, puberty, marriage and death, with specific folk dances and songs for each occasion. They believe in the existence of gods and spirits, both benevolent and malevolent.

The song here is sung at the death of a person beseeching the spirit of the dead to stop troubling the living. It is based on the Kondh belief that people love their homes so much that their souls are reluctant to leave the hearth even after death. These spirits, though generally kind, can become harmful at times since they are now unable to participate in earthly life. It is, therefore, customary to make generous offerings to the spirit. The song begins by saying that the dead spirit will be able to receive offerings only if the others in the family continue to live and prosper. They reveal their willingness to do anything to make the spirit happy but, in return, the spirit must also promise not to trouble them with its visits.

3. Adi Song for the Recovery of Lost Health

Oh my beloved one
If you lost your health due to ill luck
I come forward here to save you
With this Emul
To call back your lost health.
Listen to the sound of this sweet ornament

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And follow me to your sweet home.
I tie this Ridin creeper
To fasten your soul to your body.
Follow the footprint of this cock
Come, come with me to your home.
(Translated from the original Miri Agom)

A Note on the Adi Tribe

Adi is a generic term denoting hill people and it includes a number of groups. It may be applied to all the hill tribes around the Brahmaputra valley. The Adi are, however, concentrated in the East and West Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. They belive that every object in the universe, be it human beings, animals, trees or birds, have a spirit that needs to be nourished and propitiated. Dependent on nature for many of their needs, they believe that equilibrium in nature must always be maintained. Even though hunting is considered not just a means of procuring food but also an expression of courage and skill, they still believe that human beings must hunt for survival and not for greed.

The Adi have two major languages that they use for two different purposes. The language for routine conversation is called *Adi Agom*. The second major language still in use is *Miri Agom*, a highly rhythmic language used for chanting during their rituals. The headman of the village is generally the best hunter as well as an expert in *Miri Agom*. Both languages are living languages and rituals and ceremonies provide the occasion for the teaching of *Miri Agom* to the younger generation.

A Note on the Adi Song

The song selected here is actually a mantra that is chanted in *Miri Agom* to lure the spirit of good health back to the body of a sick person. The Adi believe that a person falls ill when the spirit of good health abandons the body due to some shock it may suffer. The above lines are chanted in a ritual performed by the maternal uncle of the sick person.

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Notes

Beloved one: the loved nephew or niece who is ill.

I come forward here to save you: the maternal uncle of the sick person comes forward to perform the ritual for the return of the spirit of good health.

Emul: amulet, here a healing ornament.

Listen to the sound of this ornament: this line and the ones that follow are addressed to the spirit of good health to request it to return to the ill body.

Your sweet home: the ill body which is the real home of the spirit of good health.

Ridin: a creeper that is supposed to have special medicinal qualities.

Fasten your soul to your body: the Ridin creeper will tie the spirit of good health to the body to ensure its continued presence.

Follow the footprints of this cock: usually an offering like a cock or a hen is made to propitiate the spirit of good health and presuade it to return to the ill body.

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About the Author

G.N. Devy, (born 1950) formerly professor of English at Maharaja Sayaji Rao University of Baroda, is the Founder Director of the Tribal Academy at Tejgarh, Gujarat. He is the Director of Sahitya Akademi's Project on Literature in Tribal Languages and Oral Traditions. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award for his book *After Amnesia* and the SAARC Writer's Foundation Award for his work on the 'denotified tribes'.

Understanding the Text

1. Identify the common characteristics shared by tribal communities all over the world.
2. What distinguishes the tribal imagination from the secular imagination?
3. How does G.N. Devy bring out the importance of the oral literary tradition?
4. List the distinctive features of the tribal arts.
5. 'New literature' is a misnomer for the wealth of the Indian literary tradition. How does G.N. Devy explain this?

Talking About the Text

Discuss the following in pairs or in groups of four

1. 'It is time to realise that unless we modify the established notion of literature as something written, we will silently witness the decline of various Indian oral traditions.'
2. 'Tribal arts are not specificlly meant for sale.' Does this help or hamper their growth and preservation?
3. Because India's tribal communities are basically bilingual there is a danger of dismissing their languages as dialects of India's major tongues.
4. While tribal communities may not seem to possess the scientific temper, there are many ideas from tribal conventions that could enrich modern societies.

Appreciation

1. How does 'A Munda Song' show that the perspective of the tribal mind towards the girl child is different from that of (other) mainstream communities?
2. How does 'A Kondh Song' substantiate the tribal urge to gain domination over time by conversing with their dead ancestors?
3. 'Adi Song for the Recovery of Lost Health' is in *Miri Agom* while *Adi Agom* is the Adi community's language for routine conversation. How does this reflect upon the high level of language sensitivity of the Adi? Can you think of other parallels in modern languages between the literary variety and the colloquial variety?

Language Work

1. Comment on the symbols used in 'A Munda Song'. What aspect of the tribal worldview do they reflect?
2. Explain the significance of the lines

   'I tie this Ridin creeper
   To fasten your soul to your body.'
3. What is the central argument of the speaker?

Suggested Reading

1. *Cultural Diversity, Linguistic Plurality and Literary Traditions in India,* ed. Sukinta Paul Kumar, for University of Delhi.

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5 What is a Good Book?

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John Ruskin

☛ *Look for these expressions and guess their meaning from the context*

canaille	peerage
fain	national noblesse of words

The good book of the hour, then—I do not speak of the bad ones—is simply the useful or pleasant talk of some person whom you cannot otherwise converse with, printed for you. Very useful often, telling you what you need to know; very pleasant often, as a sensible friend's present talk would be. These bright accounts of travels; good-humoured and witty discussions of question; lively or pathetic story-telling in the form of novel; firm fact-telling by the real agents concerned in the events of passing history—all these books of the hour, multiplying among us as education becomes more general, are a peculiar characteristic and possession of the present age: we ought to be entirely thankful for them, and entirely ashamed of ourselves if we make no good use of them. But we make the worst possible use if we allow them to usurp the place of true books: for, strictly speaking, they are not books at all but merely letters or newspapers in good print. Our friend's letter may be delightful, or necessary, today: whether worth keeping or not, is to be considered. The newspaper may be entirely proper at breakfast time but, assuredly, it is not reading for all day. So, though bound up in a volume, the long letter which gives you so pleasant an account of the inns, and roads, and weather last year at such a place, or which tells you that amusing story or gives you the real circumstances of such and such events, however valuable for occasional reference, may not be, in the real sense of

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the word, a 'book' at all, nor, in the real sense, to be 'read'. A book is essentially not a talked thing but a written thing; and written, not with the view of more communication, but of permanence. The book of talk is printed only because its author cannot speak to thousands of people at once; if he could, he would—the volume is mere 'multiplication' of his voice. You cannot talk to your friend in India; if you could, you would; you would write instead: that is mere 'conveyance' of voice. But a book is written, not to multiply the voice merely, not to carry it merely, but to preserve it. The author has something to say which he perceives to be true and useful, or helpfully beautiful. So far as he knows no one has yet said it; so far as he knows, no one else can say it. He is bound to say it, clearly and melodiously if he may; clearly, at all events. In the sum of his life he finds this to be the thing or group of things, manifest to him—this is the piece of true knowledge, or sight, which his share of sunshine and earth has permitted him to seize. He would fain set it down forever, engrave it on a rock, if he could, saying, 'This is the best of me; for the rest, I ate, and drank, and slept, loved, and hated, like another; my life was as the vapour, and is not; but this I saw and knew; this, if anything, of mine, is worth your memory.' That his 'writing', it is, in his small human way, and with whatever degree of true inspiration is in him, his inscription, or scripture.That is a 'Book'.

Perhaps you think no books were ever so written?

But, again, I ask you; do you at all believe in honesty or, at all, in kindness? Or do you think there is never any honesty or benevolence in wise people? None of us, I hope, are so unhappy as to think that. Well, whatever bit of a wise man's work is honestly and benevolently done, that bit is his book, or his piece of art. It is mixed always with evil fragments—ill-done, redundant, affected work. But if you read rightly, you will easily discover the true bits, and those **are** the book.

Now books of this kind have been written in all ages by their greatest men—by great leaders, great statesmen and great thinkers. These are all at your choice; and life is short. You have heard as much before; yet have you

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measured and mapped out this short life and its possibilities? Do you know, if you read this, that you cannot read that—that what you lose today you cannot gain tomorrow? Will you go and gossip with your housemaid, or your stable-boy, when you may talk with queens and kings; or flatter yourselves that it is with any worthy consciousness of your own claims to respect that you jostle with the common crowd for *entrée* here, an audience there, when all the while this eternal court is open to you, with its society wide as the world, multitudinous as its days, the chosen and the mighty, of every place and time? Into that you may enter always; in that you may take fellowship and rank according to your wish; from that, once entered into it, you can never be outcast but by your own fault; by your aristocracy of companionship there, your own inherent aristocracy will be assuredly tested and the motives with which you strive to take high place in the society of the living, measured, as to all the truth and sincerity that are in them, by the place you desire to take in this company of the Dead.

'The place you desire', and the place you 'fit yourself for', I must also say; because, observe, this court of the past differs from all living aristocracy in this—it is open to labour and to merit but to nothing else. No wealth will bribe, no name will overawe, no artifice will deceive the guardian of those Elysian gates. In the deep sense, no vile or vulgar person ever enters there. At the portieres of that silent Faubourg St. Germain, there is but brief question, 'Do you deserve to enter? Pass. Do you ask to be the companion of nobles? Do you long for the conversation of the wise? Learn to understand it, and you shall hear it. But on other terms? No. If you will not rise to us, we cannot stoop to you. The living lord may assume courtesy, the living philosopher explain his thought to you with considerable pain; but here we neither feign nor interpret; you must rise to the level of our thoughts if you would be gladdened by them, and share our feelings, if you would recognise our presence.'

This, then, is what you have to do and I admit that it is much. You must, in a word, love these people if you are

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to be among them. No ambition is of any use. They scorn your ambition. You must love them and show your love by a true desire to be taught by them, and to enter their thoughts. To enter into theirs, observe; not to find your own expressed by them. If the person who wrote the book is not wiser than you, you need not read it; if he be, he will think differently from you in many respects.

Very ready we are to say of a book, 'How good this is—that's exactly what I think!' But the right feeling is, 'How strange that is! I never thought of that before and yet I see it is true; or if I do not now, I hope I shall, some day.' But whether thus submissively or not, at least be sure that you go to the author to get at his meaning, not to find yours. Judge it afterwards, if you think yourself qualified to do so; but ascertain it first. And be sure also, if the author is worth anything, that you will get at his meaning all at once; nay, that at his whole meaning you will not for a long time arrive in any wise. Not that he does not say what he means, and in strong words too; but he cannot say it all; and what is more strange, will not, but in a hidden way and in parables, in order that he may be sure you want it. I cannot quite see the reason of this, nor analyse that cruel reticence in the breasts of wise men which makes them always hide their deeper thoughts. They do not give it to you by way of help, but of reward, and will make themselves sure that you deserve it before they allow you to reach it. But it is the same with the physical type of wisdom, gold. There seems, to you and me, no reason why the electric forces of the earth should not carry whatever there is of gold within it at once to the mountain tops, so that kings and people might know that all the gold they could get was there; and without any trouble of digging, or anxiety, or chance, or waste of time, cut it away, and coin as much as they needed. But nature does not manage it so. She puts it in little fissures in the earth, nobody knows where: you may dig long and find none; you must dig painfully to find any.

And it is just the same with men's best wisdom. When you come to a good book, you must ask yourself, 'Am I inclined to work as an Australian miner would? Are my

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pickaxes and shovels in good order and am I in good trim myself, my sleeves well up to the elbow, and my breath good, and my temper?' And, keeping the figure a little longer, even at the cost of tiresomeness, for it is a thoroughly useful one, the metal you are in search of being the author's mind or meaning, his words are as the rock which you have to crush and smelt in order to get at it. And your pickaxes are your own care, wit and learning; your smelting furnace is your own thoughtful soul. Do not hope to get at any good author's meaning without these tools and that fire; often you will need sharpest, finest chiselling, and patientest fusing, before you can gather one grain of metal.

And, therefore, first of all, I tell you, earnestly and authoritatively (I **know** I am right in this), you must get into the habit of looking intensely at words and assuring yourself of their meaning, syllable by syllable—nay, letter by letter. For, though it is only by reason of the opposition of letters in the function of signs, to sounds in the function of signs, that the study of books is called 'literature', and that a man versed in it is called, by the consent of nations, a man of letters instead of a man of books, or of words, you may yet connect with that accidental nomenclature this real principle: that you might read all the books in the British Museum (if you could live long enough), and remain an utterly 'illiterate', uneducated person; but that if you read ten pages of a good book, letter by letter—that is to say, with real accuracy—you are forever more in some measure with an educated person. The entire difference between education and non-education (as regards the merely intellectual part of it), consists in this accuracy. A well-educated gentleman may not know many languages—may not be able to speak any but his own—may have read very few books. But whatever language he knows, he knows precisely; whatever word he pronounces, he pronounces rightly; above all, he is learned in the peerage of words; knows the words of true descent and ancient blood, at a glance, from words of modern canaille; remembers all their ancestry—their inter-marriages, distantest relationships, and the extent to which they were admitted, and offices they held, among the national noblesse of words at any

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time, and in any country. But an uneducated person may know by memory any number of languages and talk them all, and yet truly not know a word of any—not a word even of his own. An ordinarily clever and sensible seaman will be able to make his way ashore at most ports; yet he has only to speak a sentence of any language to be known for an illiterate person: so also the accent, or turn of expression of a single sentence will at once mark a scholar. And this so strongly felt, so conclusively admitted, by educated persons, that a false accent or a mistaken syllable is enough, in the parliament of any civilized nation, to assign a man a certain degree of inferior standing forever. And this is right; but it is a pity that the accuracy insisted on is not greater, and required to a serious purpose. It is right that a false Latin quantity should excite a smile in the House of Commons; but it is wrong that a false English meaning should **not** excite a frown there. Let the accent of words be watched, by all means, but let the meaning be watched more closely still, and fewer will do the work. A few words, well chosen and well distinguished, will do work that a thousand cannot, when everyone is acting, equivocally, in the function of another. Yes; and words, if they are not watched, will do deadly work sometimes.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Ruskin (1819–1900) was a powerful and influential critic of the nineteenth century. He wrote on a variety of subjects: nature, art, architecture, politics, history. All his work is characterised by a clarity of vision.

His first volume, *Modern Painters*, appeared in 1843—it defended modernism in the arts among the works of social criticism are *Unto this Last* (1862), and *Sesame and Lilies* (1871) from which this extract has been taken.

His ideas on architecture are presented in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1853).

Understanding the Text

1. What, according to Ruskin, are the limitations of the good book of the hour?
2. What are the criteria that Ruskin feels that readers should fulfil to make themselves fit for the company of the Dead.
3. Why does Ruskin feel that reading the work of a good author is a painstaking task?
4. What is the emphasis placed by Ruskin on accuracy?

Talking About the Text

Discuss in pairs

1. Ruskin's insistence on looking intensely at words, and assuring oneself of meaning, syllable by syllable—nay, letter by letter.
2. Choice of diction is very crucial to the communication of meaning.

Appreciation

1. The text is an excerpt from *Sesame and Lilies* which consists of two essays, primarily, written for delivery as public lectures in 1864. Identify the features that fit the speech mode. Notice the sentence patterns.
2. The lecture was delivered in 1864. What are the shifts in style and diction that make the language different from the way it is used today?

Language Work

1. Many sentences and paragraphs in the excerpt begin with the word 'And'. To what extent does this contribute to the rhetorical style of the lecture?
2. Study each of the following sentences and notice the balance between its parts. Pick out other sentences in the text that reflect this kind of balance
   a. It is right that a false Latin quantity should excite a smile in the House of Commons; but it is wrong that a false English meaning should **not** excite a frown there.
   b. Let the accent of words be watched, by all means, but let the meaning be watched more closely still, and fewer will do the work.

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SUGGESTED READING

1. *Sesame and Lilies* by John Ruskin
2. *Seven Lamps of Architecture* by John Ruskin

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6 The Story

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E.M. Forster

☛ *Look for these expressions and guess their meaning from the context*

atavistic	shock-heads	ingenious

We shall all agree that the fundamental aspect of the novel is its story-telling aspect, but we shall voice our assent in different tones, and it is on the precise tone of voice we employ now that our subsequent conclusions will depend.

Let us listen to three voices. If you ask one type of man, 'What does a novel do?' he will reply placidly, 'Well—I don't know—it seems a funny sort of question to ask—a novel's a novel—well, I don't know—I suppose it kind of tells a story, so to speak'. He is quite good tempered and vague, and probably driving a motor-bus at the same time and paying no more attention to literature than it merits. Another man, whom I visualise as on a golf-course, will be aggressive and brisk. He will reply, 'What does a novel do? Why, tell a story of course and I've no use for it if it didn't. I like a story. Very bad taste, on my part, no doubt, but I like a story. You can take your art, you can take your literature, you can take your music, but give me a good story. And I like a story to be a story, mind, and my wife's the same.' And a third man, he says in a sort of drooping regretful voice, 'Yes—oh dear yes—the novel tells a story.' I respect and admire the first speaker. I detest and fear the second. And the third is myself. Yes—oh dear yes—the novel tells a story. That is the fundamental aspect without which it could not exist. That is the highest factor common to all novels, and I wish that it was not so, that it could be something different—melody, or perception of truth, not this low atavistic form.

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For, the more we look at the story (the story that is a story, mind) the more we disentangle it from the finer growths that it supports, the less shall we find to admire. It runs like a backbone—or may I say a tape-worm—for its beginning and end are arbitrary. It is immensely old—goes back to Neolithic times, perhaps to Palaeolithic. Neanderthal man listened to stories, if one may judge by the shape of his skull. The primitive audience was an audience of shock-heads, gaping round the campfire, fatigued with contending against the mammoth or the woolly rhinoceros, and only kept awake by suspense. What would happen next? The novelist droned on and, as soon as the audience guessed what happened next, they either fell asleep or killed him. We can estimate the dangers incurred when we think of the career of Scheherazade in somewhat later times. Scheherazade avoided her fate because she knew how to wield the weapon of suspense—the only literary tool that has any effect on tyrants and savages. Great novelist though she was—exquisite in her descriptions, tolerant in her judgements, ingenious in her incidents, advanced in her morality, vivid in her delineations of character, expert in her knowledge of three Oriental capitals—it was yet on none of these gifts that she relied when trying to save her life from her intolerable husband. They were but incidental. She only survived because she managed to keep the king wondering what would happen next. Each time she saw the sun rising she stopped in the middle of a sentence, and left him gaping. 'At this moment Scheherazade saw the morning appearing and, discreet, was silent.' This uninteresting little phrase is the backbone of the *One Thousand and One Nights*, the tape-worm by which they are tied together and by which the life of a most accomplished princess was preserved.

We are like Scheherazade's husband in that we want to know what happens next. That is universal and that is why the backbone of a novel has to be a story. Some of us want to know nothing else—there is nothing in us but primeval curiosity and, consequently, our other literary judgements are ludicrous. And now the story can be defined. It is a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence—

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dinner coming after breakfast, Tuesday coming after Monday, decay after death, and so on. *Qua* story, it can only have one merit; that of making the audience want to know what happens next. And, conversely, it can have only one fault: that of making the audience not want to know what happens next. These are the only two criticisms that can be made on the story. It is the lowest and simplest of literary organisms. Yet it is the highest factor common to all the very complicated organisms known as novels.

When we isolate the story like this from the nobler aspects through which it moves, and hold it out on forceps—wriggling and interminable, the naked worm of time—it presents an appearance that is both unlovely and dull. But we have much to learn from it. Let us begin by considering it in connection with daily life.

Daily life is also full of the time sense. We think one event occurs after or before another, the thought is often in our minds, and much of our talk and action proceeds from that assumption. Much of our talk and action, but not all; there seems something else in life besides time, something which may conveniently be called 'value', something which is measured not by minutes or hours, but by intensity, so that when we look at our past it does not stretch back evenly but piles up into a few pinnacles and when we look at the future it seems sometimes a wall, sometimes a cloud, sometimes a sun, but never a chronological chart. Neither memory nor anticipation is much interested in Father Time, and all dreamers, artists and lovers are partially delivered from his tyranny; he can kill them but he cannot secure their attention and, at the very moment of doom when the clock collected in the tower its strength and struck, they may be looking the other way. So daily life, whatever it may be really, is practically composed of two lives—the life in time and the life by values—and our conduct reveals a double allegiance. 'I only saw her for five minutes, but it was worth it.' There you have both allegiances in a single sentence. And what the story does is to narrate the life in time. And what the entire novel does—if it is a good novel—is to include the life by values as well; using devices hereafter to be examined. It,

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also, pays a double allegiance. But in it, the novel, the allegiance to time is imperative: no novel could be written without it. Whereas, in daily life, the allegiance may not be necessary; we do not know, and the experience of certain mystics suggests, indeed, that it is not necessary, and that we are quite mistaken in supposing that Monday is followed by Tuesday, or death by decay. It is always possible for you or me in daily life to deny that time exists and act accordingly even if we become unintelligible and are sent by our fellow citizens to what they choose to call a lunatic asylum. But it is never possible for a novelist to deny time inside the fabric of his novel: he must cling, however lightly, to the thread of his story, he must touch the interminable tape-worm otherwise he becomes unintelligible, which, in his case, is a blunder.

I am trying not to be philosophic about time for it is (experts assure us) a most dangerous hobby for an outsider, far more fatal than place; and quite eminent metaphysicians have been dethroned through referring to it improperly. I am only trying to explain that as I lecture now I hear the clock ticking, I retain or lose the time sense; whereas, in a novel, there is always a clock. The author may dislike the clock. Emily Bronte in *Wuthering Heights* tried to hide hers. Sterne, in *Tristram Shandy*, turned it upside down. Marcel Proust, still more ingenious, kept altering the hands so that his hero was at the same time entertaining a mistress to supper and playing ball with his nurse in the park. All these devices are legitimate but none of them contravene our thesis: the basis of a novel is a story and a story is a narrative of events in time sequence.

From *Aspects of the Novel* : **A Note**

These are some lectures (the Clark Lectures) which were delivered under the auspices of Trinity College, Cambridge, in the spring of 1927. They were informal, indeed talkative, in their tone and it seemed safer when presenting them in book form not to mitigate the talk, in case nothing should be left at all. Words such as 'I', 'you' 'one', 'we', 'curiously enough', 'so to speak', 'only imagine' and 'of course' will consequently occur on every page and will rightly distress

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the sensitive reader; but he is asked to remember that if these words were removed, others, perhaps more distinguished, might escape through the orifices they left and that since the novel is itself often colloquial it may possibly withhold some of its secrets from the graver and grander streams of criticism and may reveal them to backwaters and shallows.

The 1001 Arabian Nights

The 1001 Arabian Nights is a collection of stories loosely linked together, narrated by a young girl Scheherazade. She was the daughter of the vizier, or minister, who had to serve a peculiar king. The king married on a daily basis: his wife was always beheaded after the wedding night.

Scheherazade tells her father that she wished to marry the king. He reluctantly agrees. She tells the king an interesting story on their wedding night, and makes sure to stop at an interesting point at the crack of dawn. The king is unwilling to execute her because he wants to hear the end of the story. This scheme was extremely risky, but Scheherazade is successful in continually linking stories over many nights until, finally, the king accepts her as his queen and stops the horrible practice of executing his wife.

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About the Author

E.M. Forster (1879–1970), a noted English author and critic, wrote a number of short stories, novels and essays. His first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, was published in 1905. This was followed by *Howard's End* and *A Passage to India* and other well-known works. *The Hill of Devi*, a portrait of India with a commentary, appeared in 1953. The essay presented here is an excerpt from chapter two of *Aspects of the Novel.*

Understanding the Text

1. What do you understand of the three voices in response to the question 'What does a novel do'?

2. What would you say are 'the finer growths' that the story supports in a novel?
3. How does Forster trace the human interest in the story to primitive times?
4. Discuss the importance of time in the narration of a story.

Talking About the Text

Discuss in pairs or in small groups

1. What does a novel do?
2. 'Our daily life reflects a double allegiance to 'the life in time' and 'the life by values'.
3. The description of novels as organisms.

Appreciation

1. How does Forster use the analogy of Scheherazade to establish his point?
2. Taking off from Forster's references to Emily Bronte, Sterne and Proust, discuss the treatment of time in some of the novels you have read.

Language Work

1. '*Qua* story': what does the word mean? Find other expressions using the word *qua.*
2. Study the Note to *Aspects of the Novel* given at the end. Discuss the features that mark the piece as a talk as distinguished from a critical essay.
3. Try rewriting the lecture as a formal essay and examine Forster's statement: '...since the novel is itself often colloquial, it may possibly withhold some of its secrets from the graver and grander streams of criticism'.

Suggested Reading

1. *The Craft of Fiction* by Percy Lubbock
2. *The Sense of an Ending* by Frank Kermode.

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7 Bridges

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Kumudini Lakhia

☛ *Look for these words and expressions in the text and guess their meaning from the context*

infraction	demeanour
dubious assertion	synergy

If my younger self could see me now she would be incredulous. That I would work in the field of dance or decipher and translate dance for my own comprehension, call it choreography if you wish, would have been unbelievable. In this respect, I am particularly envious of dancers who claim that they were 'born to dance', implying that it was clearly laid out for them from the beginning. I must say, I find this assertion dubious; it is rarely that easy. To dance means to struggle—I believe it is the same in any discipline because discipline itself is a struggle. I believe I was not simply born to dance; I was born to live. And now, as the patchwork of my life comes into clearer focus, I can see clear bridges between my life experiences and my work in dance.

In all truth, as a child, I never did want to dance; it was forced upon me by a doting mother and a silent father. My father probably kept his peace to avoid argument. From the beginning my lessons took place under trying conditions, though I believe that the conditions were more trying for my mother than for me. She travelled in local, over-crowded trains to dance class with an unwilling child, tired from a whole day at school. She waited a whole hour in the not-so-clean ante-room of my guru's house and then endured the same journey back. This was in Bombay, and my first dance lessons were with Guru Sunder Prasad who

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lived in Chowpatty while we lived in Khar. We took the train, then a bus and then walked, and the whole trip took roughly 45 minutes each way.

Interestingly, it was the film industry that spurred my mother to enrol me in dance classes. When I was seven, we went to see a movie starring Mumtaz Ali, father of the comedian, Mehmood. Ali did a dance number in the film with which I became fascinated. When we arrived home, I began prancing around the house imitating the film actor and my mother, who was quietly watching, was the one who said, 'Kumudini, you are born to dance.' Ironically, I have no recollection of this story; it was my mother who saw this innate ability in me. Her belief was so strong that she went through the gruelling exercise of taking me to dance class four days a week without complaint.

However, my childhood education was composed of much more than just dance and academics. I did not live in a vacuum. I was surrounded by life and learnt many of my lessons there, lessons that I still carry with me. I grew up during a volatile era, a time of war, India's independence movement compounded by World War II in which India played a role in military operations. My father, being an engineer, was called upon to build the cantonment areas first in Delhi, then in Naini and Allahabad. In Delhi we were allotted a sprawling house on Hardinge Avenue (now Tilak Marg) with Liaquat Ali (later, Prime Minister of Pakistan), as our neighbour. Once his gardener caught me and my brother, Suresh, picking guavas from his tree. He grabbed us by the ear and presented us before the master for punishment. Liaquat Ali not only let us keep the guavas but extended an open invitation to pick the fruits whenever we wished! However, this generous offer was accompanied by the *mali's* face which was so horrifying and revengeful that we never went near that garden again. It was one of my first lessons in the games that politicians play.

Father would now have to move to wherever army construction was required. Therefore, when I was nine years old, the decision was made to send me to boarding school. After a lot of arguments, advice, consideration and research on the part of my parents, I was packed off to Queen Mary's

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College (school) in Lahore (at that time in India). I had not known a day away from home, but the idea of living with a lot of girls of my age and studying in a fancy school was both exciting and worrisome, as curiosity was mixed with sadness. No more shuffling to and from class, no more over-bearing Guruji.

No such luck. Mother sent a dance teacher, Radhelal Misra, Sunder Prasad's nephew, along with me! She hired a small apartment for him in Lahore and arranged a schedule for my lessons. Despite her belief that I was 'born' to dance, I didn't enjoy dance classes. Quite frankly, they were no fun. I felt as if nothing progressed, that I was just doing what my guru ordered. I was always a curious child and I wanted to know and understand what I was doing. Why was I gyrating in this way? But my teacher could not, or would not, explain it to me. I was envious of other girls who were playing tennis and basketball while I was doing this thing called Kathak. My mother convinced the principal, a Britisher, that to dance was a form of prayer and that she could not curb religious freedom! Having spent several years in a school where most of our teachers were British, I have come to like their form of discipline. Discipline in one's daily routine does bring discipline in thinking. You begin to place your thoughts in neat little piles the way you do your uniforms and shoes.

It was three weeks before the final school examinations—matriculation at that time—when my life changed dramatically. I was called to the Principal's office. What had I done? The only reason one was called to Miss Cox's office was because of some infraction. While she was a kind and diplomatic person, she was also strict and firm and later, when I myself became a teacher, I was influenced by her demeanour. As I approached the office, I wondered—did I forget to put away the tennis racquets after morning play? Did I forget to lock the door of the dormitory?

'May I come in, madam?' I asked quietly.

'Yes do come in child,' she answered with a voice full of such kindness that it made me suspicious, 'You have to go home.'

'But why? I have to study for my exams!'

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'Your father called to say that your mother is sick and he would like you to visit her.'

During the walk back from Miss Cox's office to my classroom I was overwhelmed with feelings of confusion, a state of mind I have never completely got over. Even today, when I want to create a new piece, the first theme that comes to my mind vibrates with confusion.

Mother was already dead when I arrived, 36 hours and three train-rides later. When I saw her, motionless and colourless, I finally understood why I had been summoned home. I was 14 years old. The air was still and nobody looked at me. I did not know where to turn or what to do with my hands, which hung loose from my body. Then suddenly they clutched my stomach. Hunger pangs? I hadn't eaten for three days and there was an emptiness I wanted to fill. I was afraid of appearing greedy, so I underplayed my emotions, though all kinds of yearning gnawed my insides.

Even today I mistake the different kinds of hunger inside me, and this is something that shows up in my work. The dangling arms find expression in my choreography. In *Duvidha* or *Conflict*, I examined the plight of a middle-class woman who is chained to the traditions of Indian life. She is restricted to domestic circles, is forbidden from wearing sleeveless blouses, must wear her hair in a bun and must cater to her husband. Yet, from a small window she sees the newspaperman waving images of a woman with a bold streak of white in her short hair, who wears sleeveless blouses, is surrounded by men who listen to her intently, is widowed but wears colourful saris. Moreover, she commands a country with millions of people. Yet, while the woman looking out of the window is intrigued by this image, she experiences conflicting emotions. The character in *Duvidha* is torn between two lives—she feels an emptiness within her but is not sure what she is hungry for, what kind of life she wants. This is something I have felt often, yet now that I have so much behind me, I am more certain of where to place my hands.

My exams yielded surprisingly good results. So, now what? Where do I go from here? This question has cropped

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up throughout my life, and many years later took shape in my composition, *Atah Kim*. It's funny how we store our experiences in our brains as if we are pre-recorded cassettes. The right cassette seems to fall into place when you least expect it to. Upon finishing school, I was at a crossroads and the path ahead was not clear to me. I had lots of ideas about what I wanted to do with my life, and dance was not always a priority. I was always driven, and that partly stems from the fact that I had a relatively subdued childhood. I was enveloped by a great mist of protection and I wanted to emerge from that mist and discover myself. In particular, I wanted to feel powerful; to control a large group of people. In *Atah Kim* I address this desire for power and, yet, once you possess it, what do you do with it? Once you reach your goal, where do you go from there? It's a question without an answer but I believe the question must be asked.

At the age of 15, I had many options. It would have been easy enough to join college for a bachelor's or master's degree in psychology or English literature. But everyone does that. 'You have to do something that is off-beat, different from the done thing,' my father said to me. So it was that I decided to attend an agriculture college in Naini, Allahabad. There were twenty-nine boys and I, in a class of thirty. Having spent my school years in a girls' school, I knew little about the behaviour of boys. My brother was seven years younger so his friends were no help. However, at the agriculture college, I got a taste of relations between boys and girls. We had to travel for miles in the fields on bicycles. The boys deflated the tires of my bicycle so that they could walk back with me, resulting in miles and miles of worthless conversation about the latest film songs and actors, none of which interested me.

Also, I was fascinated by the professors, mostly American, who wore shorts because we worked in fields with clay, crops, manure and insecticides. One day, I also turned up in shorts and had 58 eyes peering at my legs! My grandmother had always said that girls must never push their chests out or uncover their legs. I now realised what she meant but couldn't accept it as valid. 'What about

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the short blouses you wear, with your midriff showing?' I asked her.

'Don't argue,' was her reply.

When will we understand the dignity of the female body? A dancer has to move with dignity, a quality much desired amongst dancers but sadly missing in most, especially women, as they are taught to underplay their bodies most of their lives. My grandmother, of course, was not completely to blame for this attitude. It is a problem that goes deep into the texture of our society. We must embrace our senses and use them to the fullest, rather than try to inhibit them.

Another argument I often had with my grandmother was about religion and visiting temples. 'Go to the temple before your exams, God will give you strength to do well,' she would say. I took issue with the idea that an outside force must be bargained with in order to obtain desirable results. Doesn't this strength come from within? I had a hard time believing that it was God alone who endowed me with this ability. Visiting temples activates your senses, though we often take this for granted. You see the grandeur of the architecture and can feel the curve of the stones. The scent of incense, flowers and sandalwood mingle together. You hear the ringing of the bells and taste the *panchamrut*. With your palms and the soles of your feet you touch the different surfaces. What an experience! Why do I have to bargain with God as if he is some kind of agent for a trading company? Yet these arguments with my grandmother were useful in that they made me differentiate between sensitivity and sentimentality. Later, I created a piece called *Panch Paras*, the five senses, to explore this realm.

After graduating with a degree in agriculture at the age of 18, I was left with few job prospects and was again at a crossroads. Luckily, good fortune came to me without much beckoning. It happened in Bombay. I had gone to the train station to see off Suresh who was studying at Sherwood College in Nainital. While I was waving to the train that had now disappeared, there was a tap on my shoulder. I turned around and the woman who stood there

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changed the course of my life. All those tedious hours of dance lessons fused into a new synergy. She was Komlata Dutt, a friend of my father's and, more importantly, the person who introduced Uday Shankar to the dance legend, Anna Pavlova, in Paris. And here she was, telling me to join the Ram Gopal Dance Company based in London!

It took some learning to adjust to working with a group of professional dancers and musicians, on the move all the time, and the opportunity exposed me to a very different aspect of dance education—there was a lot of dance to be learnt as well—*kummi* of Kerala, *ghumar* of Rajasthan, *dandia* of Gujarat—all were part of the troupe's repertoire. What I enjoyed most was learning the classical Bharatanatyam from Ram Gopal himself who was a strict disciplinarian and had a fetish for perfection of line. However, in the end he would say, 'You've perfected the technique, now throw it overboard and dance'. This is a lesson I have tried to teach my own students—before you begin experimenting, you need to perfect the technique with which you experiment.

Touring with Ram Gopal not only taught me more about dance, I discovered new things about my own personality. Encountering people from different countries gives you a chance to look at yourself in a new light. More often than not, I found that my weaknesses were brought glaringly into focus. I came to realise the importance of context—how things change when you change their placement. One of the most striking moments of that tour was my time in post-war Germany. It was an unbelievably sad place. Hungry children begging for food is a common sight in India, yet, in Germany the same sight created a different sensation. It amazed me how the same situation in a different environment evokes quite different reactions, and the same is true in dance. One changes the placement of a choreographic piece on stage and it looks quite different. I myself was a changed person when placed in different surroundings.

Still, a long tour of many countries in Europe and America is exhausting. I was constantly travelling between India and various parts of the globe. In all, I was abroad for

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three years and by the end, I needed to go home. But where was home? And how does one make a home for oneself? Buy a house, get married, have children, make friends? I had only the last item on the agenda. While in school in Lahore, I had made a lot of friends, but they now lived in a different country—Pakistan. I had to obtain a visa to visit my closest friend over a weekend. I would like to say I am apolitical but I've discovered that politics makes its presence felt even when uninvited.

On my return, the last of many returns, what ultimately awaited me were marriage, children and a flat in Bombay. Finally I had a home, but it came with strings attached—I now had to manage this new home. In a society like ours, where a woman wanting to work outside the home must do so in addition to her domestic responsibilities, it is easy to feel overwhelmed. Still, I didn't do too badly thanks to my supportive husband, Rajanikant. In spite of his own background in a family where men are treated as a special breed, he was a good man, with the extraordinary quality of believing everything. The word 'suspicion' was absent from his vocabulary. This made him popular but unsuccessful, both as a professional and a parent, but a very accommodating husband. My biggest benefit from my association with him was the love of music he instilled in me. If he had chosen music as a profession he would have done better in life, but his bar-at-law from Lincoln's Inn in London pushed him into the wrong line of work.

I must say, I am blessed with a wonderful family, two normal and healthy children, my son Shriraj and daughter Maitreyi, now married with their own children. Looking back, I keep wondering what my contribution was as a mother, but it must have been satisfactory to attain these results. And yet, both are completely different in their attitudes and philosophies—one has an extended sense of ambition and the other allows things to transpire as they are destined to. The only point on which they agree is that they disagree with my profession! It is interesting to have this kind of variety in a family. Living with a group of different personalities beneath one roof is like performing with other artistes on stage. The equation, the space factor,

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vibrations and relationships must be taken into serious consideration. You are no longer performing solo. You belong to a larger image and must develop a new set of performing skills.

About the Author

Kumudini Lakhia (born 1930) is a renowned Kathak dancer and choreographer who was taught and influenced by the famous Ram Gopal. She has performed in over 40 countries, but chose to give up her career as a solo performer to start the Kadamb Dance Centre in Ahmedabad, where she trains students in the art of classical Kathak dance. Her other achievements include choreographing for two very successful Hindi films, *Umrao Jaan* and *Sur Sangam*. Her awards include the All India Sangeet Natya Kala Award (1977); Sangeet Natak Akademi National Award (1982); Kala Ratna Award; Sangeet Kala Sangam (1982); and the Padma Shri in 1987. On the occasion of 50 years of Independence, the city of Ahmedabad awarded her with the Nagar Bhushan.

Understanding the Text

1. How did the author feel about her mother's passion to make her a dancer?
2. What were the lessons of life learnt in her younger days that Kumudini carried into her adult life?
3. How did Kumudini react to her mother's death?
4. What were the concepts that Kumidini Lakhia represent through *Duvidha*, *Atah Kim* and *Panch Paras*?
5. How does Kumudini Lakhia describe her guru Ramgopal's influence on her?

Talking About the Text

Discuss the following in pairs or in small groups

1. Exceptionally talented people are born so; talent cannot be cultivated.

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2. Discipline and a questioning spirit can coexist in an individual.
3. "Before you begin experimenting, you need to perfect the technique with which you experiment."
4. Kumudini Lakhia's life is an inspiring illustration of the emancipation of women.

Appreciation

1. The significance of reading an autobiograophy lies in drawing lessons from another life. What is the significance of Kumudini's account for us as readers?
2. Pick out instances from the passage that reflect the sensitivity of the author.
3. 'I can see clear bridges between my life experiences and my work in dance.' How does Kumudini Lakhia weave episodes from the two realms in her account?

Language Work

1. Distinguish between the following pairs of words

incredulous	-	incredible
suspicious	-	susceptible
sensitivity	-	sentimentality
successive	-	successful

2. Interpret these phrases in the context of the essay

mist of protection	at a crossroads
it came with strings attached	

3. 'Kummi', 'ghumar' and 'dandia' are some dance forms mentioned in the text. Make an inventory of folk dance forms in the different regions of the country.

Suggested Reading

1. *Women who Dared* ed Ritu Menon, National Book Trust, 2000.

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Glossary

Selected Literary Forms

Ballad : A form of verse, adapted for singing or recitation which presents a dramatic or exciting episode in simple, narrative form.

Dramatic Monologue : A poetic soliloquy in which the speaker reveals his own character. Usually a listener is present who does not speak but plays a part in the development of the poem.

Fable: A brief tale in either prose or verse, with a moral. Usually, but not always, the characters are animals and birds.

Satire: Verse or prose blending a critical attitude with humour and wit; the purpose being to ridicule frailties and follies in human customs and institutions and by causing laughter, to inspire their reform.

Lyric: A fairly short poem consisting of the utterance by a single speaker, who expresses a state of mind or a process of perception, thought and feeling.

Ode: A long lyric poem that is serious in subject and treatment, elevated in style and elaborate in its stanzaic structure.

Sonnet: A lyric poem consisting of fourteen lines, linked by an intricate hyme scheme.

Allegory: A story, play, poem, picture etc. in which meaning or message is represented symbolically.

Selected Literary Terms

Refrain: A group of words forming a phrase or sentence and repeated at regular intervals in a poem, usually at the end of a stanza. The refrain probably developed from the old ballad.

Pathos : In literature and drama, the portrayal of an incident in such a way so as to arouse feelings of pity, tenderness or sadness in the reader or spectator.

Irony : A form of speech in which the actual intent is expressed in words that carry the opposite meaning.

Sarcasm : A sneering or cutting remark; an ironical taunt.

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